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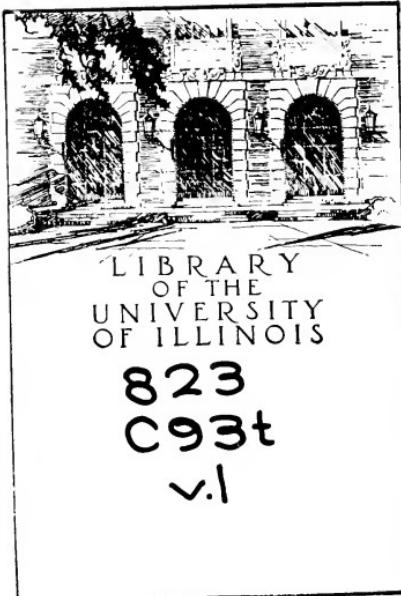
Love

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by

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THRO' LOVE AND WAR.

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HURST & BLACKETT, 13 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

# THRO' LOVE AND WAR

BY

VIOLET FANE

AUTHOR OF 'SOPHY; OR THE ADVENTURES OF A SAVAGE,'  
'THE EDWIN AND ANGELINA PAPERS,' ETC., ETC.

'Thro' Love and War,—by ways of Death and Doubt,  
My soul has travell'd to the hoped-for Heaven.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# 'THRO' LOVE AND WAR.'

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## CHAPTER I.

It has been said, somewhere, that the happiest women—like the happiest nations—have no history. And so, if the existence of Miss Lucy Barlow, of 'Barlow Lodge,' Clapham Common, had been altogether prosperous and unchequered, it would have been scarcely worth my while to write about her at all.

At this allusion to Clapham Common I seem to see upon the faces of my readers—those, at any rate, who are of the haughty and supercilious sort—an expression as if of disappointment.

"Clapham Common!" (I fancy I can hear them exclaim). 'Miss Lucy Barlow, then, belongs to that vast prolific, cockney middle class, that

makes its principal meal about mid-day, confines its dinner-napkins within rings of bone, betel-nut, and base-metal ; purchases its necessaries at the Co-operative Stores, and does its journeyings by tramcar and omnibus ! Her surroundings must be vulgar, common-place, devoid of romantic association. It will be hard to become interested in her prosaic doings !'

And, indeed, in order to become really interesting, apart from the interest which is attached to a charming exterior, Lucy Barlow, in common with every other heroine of romance, should pass through and become purified in the furnace of affliction. This grand crucial test of character, however, is as independent of caste, as it is of locality, and it is possible to be quite as miserable upon Clapham Common as anywhere else.

My story opens upon a wet afternoon in early summer—one of the first wet days following upon a long season of drought, and seeming, therefore, except to such persons as were anxious about their crops, all the more gloomy and unbearable from the contrast to its predecessors.

Miss Lucy Barlow had been engaged for some time in what is called 'flattening' her nose against one of the two windows in the dining-

room at Barlow Lodge which looked out upon the Common. Happily, the term is merely figurative, for her nose was much too pretty to flatten, being exceedingly well formed, as, indeed, were all her other features.

'I wonder, Aunty, if it means to go on pouring all day?' she said at last, addressing herself to her paternal great-aunt, Miss Elizabeth Barlow, the present occupant of Barlow Lodge, a handsome old lady in spectacles, who was seated at a writing-table hard-by. 'The postman has been past three times,' she went on, 'and has never once stopped here. How I wish that some one would come and call, or that something would happen!'

'I wish so, too, dear,' returned the venerable lady, 'if it would give you any satisfaction; I fear, however, that we mustn't expect visitors to-day. Being Monday the Marquis is engaged in the afternoon with the child of that person next door, and Mr. Podmore is still staying with his friends in the Isle of Wight.'

Lucy made a slight gesture of impatience.

'Really, Aunty, I can do very well without Mr. Podmore! He is not in the least essential to my happiness! What I was wishing was more

for something unexpected. On wet days I often do ; I know it's very silly !'

'And pray, my dear, what form do you wish this unexpected event to take ?'

'Oh, that's what I don't quite know—a sudden piece of news ; a great battle ; an invasion ; something blown up, or set fire to, or run off the line ; or a present by the post, all tied up in a jeweller's case and registered, and worth thousands and thousands of pounds ; or the arrival of some unexpected relation that one has never heard of, coming in all booted and spurred and covered with mud, from a tremendously long journey.'

'Mr. Podmore will return in a few days from the Isle of Wight,' remarked the elder lady, in a consolatory tone. 'No doubt he will have plenty of news to tell us, and he is sure to bring us all the last illustrated papers.'

A quick sigh escaped the younger lady, and she withdrew from the window.

'The fact is, Aunty,' she said, as she began absently poking the fire, for a fire there was as the day was so chilly in spite of its being the last week in the merry month, 'I'm in a thoroughly idle mood to-day ! I shall go and clean out my

tiresome aquarium, and then try and illuminate another page in that hideous new photograph book, just to kill time !'

' My dear, pray spare the best poker ! ' exclaimed Miss Elizabeth anxiously. ' How like a Barlow to poke the fire in that violent way ! Mr. Podmore would not like to hear you talking about " killing time," I 'm sure,' she added, somewhat reproachfully ; ' he would say that it went far too quickly already, and that we may employ it in so many useful ways.'

' Yes, I know that he would ; but then I 'm sure I 'm quite different from him ! I mean, of course, that I 'm less perfect. I feel, to-day, as if I could kill all sorts of things besides time—even Mr. Podmore, himself ! I 've got quite a homicidal fit upon me ! But I 'll be off, now, and clean out my aquarium ! '

As she spoke she tied on a large brown holland lawn-tennis apron, worked over with yellow marigolds, in order to protect her neat morning dress, and she then went into the adjoining room to begin her ' time-killing.'

As soon as the door was closed upon her, Miss Elizabeth Barlow took up her pen, and resumed the letter upon which she had been engaged.

'And now, dear Mr. Podmore,' she wrote, 'a few words upon the subject nearest to both our hearts! I am sure that, could you but become invisible for a day, and listen to some of our private conversations, even *you* would be amazed at my diplomatic talents, for I am even a wonder to myself. Ah, it is not in vain that I am descended, lineally, from the worthy Griffinhoofe de Barlow, Abbot of St. Opportune, who, as I think I may have told you, pleaded so eloquently with the envoys of King Henry the Eighth against the dispersion of the Monastic Institutions! . . . '

Arrived at this point, she set down her pen, in order to consider whether anybody could properly be said to descend 'lineally' from an Abbot—Abbots being vowed, as she had always heard, to perpetual celibacy. Not for worlds would she have offended Mr. Podmore's susceptibilities, and she was jealous, too, of the fair fame of the Abbot of St. Opportune. . . . . But, perhaps, there may have been such personages as 'Lay' Abbots; there had been 'Lay' Cardinals, of this she felt certain: Mr. Podmore, with all his wisdom, might not know whether there had been or not! . . . 'He was a "Lay" Abbot,' she added, therefore, in a little foot-note, and after affixing

what looked like an enormous spider to the place in order to call attention to it, she proceeded thus with her letter :—

‘I have acted just as you kindly and wisely suggested. “Let my name,” (I remember your saying to me when last we talked upon this subject,) “become associated in her mind only with good, and great, and wise, and noble images; with sights that are beautiful, and with sounds that are harmonious, until it is impossible for her to contemplate anything which either interests or improves without murmuring to herself, ‘It is Sydney Podmore who has led me to this!’ in this way, she will grow to care for me unconsciously, before even I have informed her of my intentions;” and it is upon this excellent advice that I shall continue to act, my dear Mr. Podmore, and not, I sincerely hope, without happy results. Dear Lucy and I have passed a very pleasant, quiet afternoon together to-day, notwithstanding that it has been so wet, and that all we Barlows are positively just like barometers, affected by the slightest atmospheric change. Lucy is looking forward to colouring some more of the illuminations in the beautiful photograph book you so kindly gave her last week ; and I can hear her now, in the

next room, engaged as busily as a bee with your other valuable present, the aquarium, in which she appears to take the greatest delight and interest!'

But at this moment the door separating the two rooms was thrown suddenly open, and Lucy flew towards her aunt with an expression of mingled terror and disgust upon her face.

'Oh! Aunty!' she exclaimed, wiping her fingers with her apron, as though to remove the traces of some sort of contamination. 'I've had such a dreadful fright! That nasty, big, pink, sea-anemone had become unstuck, and had fallen down, and I thought it was dead, and picked it up, and it put its long fingers out all over mine, and it was so soft, and cold, and damp, and fat, and flabby, it really made me feel quite faint! It felt just like touching one of Mr. Podmore's hands!' and she flung herself into a chair with a shudder.

Lucy knew that she must seem to her kind great-aunt to be ungrateful for 'looking' (as it were) 'a gift-mollusc in the mouth,' but then she had always felt an aversion for these pulpy and passionless organisms, wondering to herself for the fulfilment of what mission they could

possibly have been created, and she had never desired that Mr. Podmore should present her with an 'aquarium' at all. If, indeed, molluscs had only been possessed of 'mouths' into the which one might 'look'! But they had no attempt at features of any kind, and between them and her there seemed to be 'a great gulf fixed' in consequence. A nice, cosy, comfortable creature, with some sort of a face, clothed in soft fur or wool, she could have loved with a foolish love. Little chirping, empty-headed, feathered things, too, with happy hopping feet, and twittering voices, were always interesting; but these horrid, clammy, unsympathetic deformities! . . . Miss Elizabeth Barlow looked somewhat disconcerted at her niece's words. When, however, Lucy had recovered herself sufficiently to repair again to the 'aquarium,' she resumed her still unfinished letter.

'In fact, dear Mr. Podmore,' she wrote, after placing a full stop at the end of her last sentence, 'should your flattering designs respecting dear Lucy's future be doomed, unfortunately, to disappointment, I shall feel that the blame cannot justly be said to rest with myself, for I have followed your admirable suggestions to the very

letter. I do not think, either, that you will reproach me, now, with what may have appeared to you at the time like undue anxiety with regard to the disposal of my property. I feel that I may write quite openly to one who has treated me with so much confidence. The money in question, then, I could not regard as actually my own. I have been enabled to set it aside during a life which has not required the display of any sort of extravagant expenditure, in order that dear Lucy might be at least independent at my death, which, at my advanced age, may not be very far distant, in spite of the good health with which Providence has deigned to bless me. I agree with you, dear Mr. Podmore, that I am receiving for this money an absurdly small rate of interest, and that, as you so kindly represented to me, I could more than double my present income by investing the capital in some of the magnificent schemes which you and your powerful associates have at present in hand. I feel deeply the privilege you have afforded me in making known to me these enterprises; but, I feel, also, that I am not exactly what can be called a very experienced woman of business. My dear brother, it is true, em-

barked, greatly to the surprise of my grandfather, in commerce, but he was the first Barlow who had ever done so. Our traditions, therefore, are *chivalrous* rather than *financial*, and it has been a comfort to me to remember that dear Lucy's little fortune, even if it was not increasing very rapidly, was, at any rate, perfectly safe. I hesitated, therefore, foolishly, as you may have fancied, to profit by your very kind and friendly representations upon this subject, for I knew not at that time the prime reason of your solicitude for our welfare. But the whole matter has assumed for me quite a different complexion since the confidential communication you made me the other day. I can promise nothing definite, of course, for I have as yet scarcely had time for proper reflection; but I can promise you, at least, that I will turn the matter over in my mind with attention, for, under the present altered circumstances, many of my previous objections must necessarily be removed. With regard, however, to my niece's personal feelings, I should be greatly to blame were I to write with any certainty. She is scarcely yet nineteen; an age at which girls were quite competent, in my young days, to know their own minds, and look after a family; but Lucy

has, hitherto, led so secluded a life, she has seen, as yet, so little of the world, that she is full young for her years. We see but few visitors—as you are aware—my solicitor, Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Bury (for alas! who can be independent of their doctor?) and the local clergyman and his family. Is she then (I ask myself anxiously) quite fitted at present to decide upon a question so important? I should have wished her, I confess, to have seen more of the outside world, but, as yet, she has never, as I think you are aware, quitted the narrow preeinets of my own home; except, when she has been with me, for a short time, upon a visit to the sea-side. It would have been an advantage to her, no doubt, to have been sent, for awhile, to a first-rate finishing school at Brighton which had been highly recommended to me, and at which her cousin, Miss Adeliza Binks, (the daughter of Lady Mabella Binks, of whom you may have heard me speak,) had received a very brilliant education. But, so careful have I ever been to superintend, personally, dear Lucy's mental and moral development, that I preferred, as I have already told you, that she should receive her lessons in music, and other modern accomplishments, beneath my own roof. You have met

Miss Simpkins, the young lady who used to attend her as daily governess, and must admit that she was a person of refined and prepossessing manners: I had been particular, also, to ascertain that she bore an unexceptionable moral character. What then, my dear Mr. Podmore, can be the "counteracting foreign influences" of which you begged me to "beware" in your last kind letter? . . .

But it seemed fated that the good lady should not conclude her letter without further interruption, for just at this moment, a light tap was heard at the door.

'If you please, Mum,' said the voice of Sarah the parlourmaid, 'Are you at home to the Marquee?'

'Yes, Sarah, of course! Beg him to go into the drawing-room; Miss Lucy is there, and I will come to him as soon as I have finished a letter for the country post.'

It was rather strange, Miss Elizabeth could not help thinking, that this particular visitor should have been announced just as she happened to be alluding to 'counteracting foreign influences' in her letter to Mr. Podmore!

## CHAPTER II.

ACHILLE, Marquis de la Vieilleroche ('the Marquess,' as he has just been styled) was to all appearance a man of about sixty years of age, tall, spare, and upright, with rather a Quixotic cast of countenance. Notwithstanding his high-sounding title, he was nothing more, at least in the country of his adoption, than a teacher of languages. *French*, seeing that he was a Frenchman, was, as a matter of course, his 'strong point,' but he gave lessons also in the Italian and Spanish tongues, to those who were not very particular as to their accent. He had been established for more than fifteen years in the vicinity of Clapham Common; and here it was that Miss Elizabeth Barlow had made his acquaintance, when her great-niece was almost a baby. The old lady was at once impressed by his distinguished bearing and agreeable manners, and

he had been engaged to instruct Lucy in French as soon as she was of an age to learn. As the years went on, however, he was enabled to be of use to the two ladies in a variety of other ways. Miss Elizabeth's former friends, many of them her seniors as to age, were gradually dropping off, and she had felt, upon several occasions, the want of an intelligent male adviser. Such a one Monsieur de la Vieilleroche had come in time to be considered, and, once he had been received by Miss Elizabeth upon this friendly footing, he had refused to accept any remuneration for his professional visits, with which act of disinterestedness the old lady was profoundly touched, seeing that his means were exceedingly slender. Previously to settling himself at Clapham, the Marquis had resided in Paris and in London, where, according to his own account, he had mixed in the very highest society, and become intimate with many noble, and even *royal* personages. It is true that Miss Barlow had heard a report to the effect that this pretended intimacy had been acquired whilst following the profession of a *maitre d'armes*, but a photograph, which Monsieur de la Vieilleroche soon afterwards displayed, representing his ancestral *château* upon the Loire (a magnificent edifice

of the cruet-stand order of architecture), had served to dispel every feeling of uneasiness with regard to his antecedents, and she and her niece Lucy remained convinced that, whatever might have been the vicissitudes through which he had passed, Monsieur de la Vieilleroche was a person of the very highest respectability, and a real nobleman besides, from head to foot ;—that everybody must see at a glance !

As the elder Miss Barlow was imbued with rather exalted notions as to her own, and her niece's, social standing and importance, she prided herself upon being extremely exclusive, particularly as regarded her immediate neighbours ; and it is probable that, but for an accidental circumstance, the Marquis, whose rank and nationality seemed to separate him entirely from all other Claphamites, would have continued to be, with the exception of the clergyman, the lawyer, and the doctor, her solitary suburban friend.

As it happened, however, some five or six years before the date at which this story opens, important political changes had obliged him to revisit his native shores. For nearly a whole month, there had been a vacant place in the chimney-corner at Barlow Lodge, and Miss

Barlow and her great-niece had played their evening rubber with a double-dummy.

It was during this interval, that Sydney Podmore, a wealthy and influential stockbroker (or so rumour had it), took possession of the large white villa upon the left-hand side of Miss Elizabeth's modest residence, and immediately set about re-decorating it in a very florid and expensive style.

If it had been Mr. Podmore's intention upon his arrival to ingratiate himself with Miss Elizabeth Barlow, he could have had no cause to complain of the malevolence of Destiny. From the very first, it was as though the Fates were bent upon bringing about this neighbourly fusion; and, some subterranean complications, arising out of the contiguity of the two houses, having obliged him to seek a personal interview with the venerable occupant of Barlow Lodge, he contrived, within a week, to place her under such a series of important obligations, that it was impossible for her to exclude him afterwards from her limited home-circle.

For instance, upon the occasion of the bursting of Miss Elizabeth Barlow's kitchen-boiler, he had generously supplied herself and her establishment with cooked meat for the space of three

whole days, during which time it was impossible for her to light a fire in her kitchen ; and when, only a short while afterwards, the chimney of that same kitchen accidentally caught fire, he had displayed so much zeal and activity whilst assisting at its extinction, that kind Miss Barlow, seeing that he was of an exceedingly full habit of body, had quite trembled for his personal safety. Then, again, he had been aided in his friendly advances by important territorial advantages, for, not only was he the proud possessor of ‘the spacious and commodious mansion’ known as Palmyra House, that imposing Corinthian edifice which larded it over its less pretentious neighbours, but Barlow Lodge itself, which was a portion of the same estate, had passed also into his hands ; and Miss Elizabeth, whose lease had still a good many years to run, found herself basking in one of the most accommodating of landlords’ smiles. The other ‘villa-residence,’ standing in its own grounds, immediately to the right of Miss Barlow’s, and separated from it by an old grey wall against which the fruit trees, planted *en espalier*, outstretched their lean branches like appealing arms, was the property of an ‘infant,’ who, it was whispered, would be almost certain to

dispose of it upon attaining his majority; and Mr. Podmore had already instructed his agents to apply for the 'first refusal.'

At the time of which I write,—not many years, by the way, prior to the time at which I am writing—this villa, 'The Aspens,'—as it had been fancifully styled, for not the shadow of an aspen-tree was to be seen anywhere near it,—was rented by a lady occupying, evidently, a somewhat equivocal position. She has been already alluded to by the elder Miss Barlow as 'that person next door'; but she was designated in harder and less charitable terms by some of her other neighbours. Her name,—at least so Sarah the parlourmaid informed Lucy,—was 'Van Bruin,' 'Van Buren,' something, at any rate, with a 'Van' in it; and Sarah had heard that she was said to be 'no lady,' but was thought to have been some kind of a 'play-actress' or 'music-singer,' or something even 'a great deal worse.'

Sarah the parlourmaid was Lucy's only informant upon this mysterious subject. From Monsieur de la Vicilleroche no enlightening details were to be learned, although, in consequence of the fact that he was instructing little Miss 'Van' Something in the French language, he had ob-

tained an *entrée* to the house. Lucy's questions were always dismissed with a few ambiguous phrases which left her not one whit the wiser.

The 'person next door' appeared but very seldom in her garden,—in that portion of it at any rate that was visible from Barlow Lodge. Two or three times, when Lucy had been gazing from an upper window, she had espied a large, showy-looking woman, with high heels and a tightened waist, walking up and down upon the other side of the grey pear-tree wall, under an elaborately laced parasol ; but it was impossible to distinguish her features very clearly, and beyond a general notion of a large, pale face, with regular features, marked eyebrows, and a mop of yellowish hair, Lucy could form but little idea of her personal appearance. Sometimes she had been accompanied in her walk by a pretty little over-dressed child, and followed by a black 'Ayah,' swathed in a native dress of white muslin and raw silk. This seemed to point to Indian antecedents : perhaps the lady with a 'Van' in her name was what was popularly called an 'Indian grass-widow ?'

That she was, at any rate, a most inveterate and determined 'music-singer' was evident to Lucy Barlow in common with the whole neigh-

bourhood. Such a shrill, penetrating, unsympathetic *soprano* voice! The sound of it would force its way through the windows at all hours and seasons; and one could almost see, in the mind's eye, the terrible facial contortions which must have been necessary in order to produce such terrible shrieking, quivering, and gasping.

'That woman is a positive nuisance to the neighbourhood,' Mr. Podmore would remark, when he had been disturbed by these sounds. 'Were she to remain here much longer, the value of the adjoining property would be very seriously depreciated: I confess I am surprised that our friend the Marquis should consent to give lessons to the child of such a creature. The French, however, are known to be excessively lax upon some subjects.'

Mr. Podmore, in fact, appeared to be panting to annex 'The Aspens,'—to improve, to demolish, to redecorate. He had settled already upon the changes which would probably ensue upon the coming of age of the 'infant.'

'I must have glass,' he would say, waving his plump, white hand in the direction of the grey pear-tree wall,—'plenty of glass! . . . I shall construct orchard-houses. From these very win-

dows, my dear Miss Barlow, you will be able to see, some day, I hope, almost a quarter of a mile of glass! . . . There,' with another flourish of the hand, 'I intend to build my new stables, they shall be handsome,—extremely handsome,—no "eye-sores" for me! . . . Leading up to them, there will be gateways,—very fine gateways indeed, with a good deal of ornamental gilding.' And so on, and so on: the place, in fact, seemed to have become to him a veritable Naboth's vineyard!

The old French professor would not have been human could he have seen, upon his return from the Continent, his place at Barlow Lodge usurped, as it were, by a stranger, without some sort of annoyance, which it was with difficulty that he managed at first to conceal. By-and-by, however, he determined to swallow his vexation, and to take the matter good-naturedly. That Frenchman has yet to be born who is possessed of neither personal nor intellectual vanity, and the Marquis was not long in discovering that he could obtain food for both when in the society of Mr. Podmore, whose appearance and address made him act as an excellent 'foil.'

From a foil he speedily became a butt,—a grindstone upon which the lively Frenchman

could sharpen the edge of his Voltairean wit; and the moment eventually arrived when the ostentatious possessor of Palmyra House seemed to have become as essential to his well-being as to that of Miss Elizabeth herself. In a word, the two family friends had apparently settled down at Barlow Lodge as contentedly as did ever any cat and dog that have come to be comrades through necessity. Whether these creatures are *really* fond of each other, is a question which can only be answered when beasts find human tongues.

Upon the chilly summer afternoon when this story opens, Monsieur de la Vieilleroche had come to Barlow Lodge direct from 'The Aspens,' and so had scarcely need to do more than open and shut his time-honoured umbrella upon the way, seeing that the distance between the two houses was so short. Lucy, delighted to escape from the society of her undemonstrative molluscs, engaged him in friendly converse until her great-aunt had completed her letter, when *she*, too, joined her visitor in the drawing-room; and, seeing that the evening was so wet and tempestuous for his homeward walk, begged forthwith that he would do her the pleasure of remaining on to dinner—a repast which did not take place at quite so late an hour at

Barlow Lodge as it did at the homes of many more fashionable persons. The Marquis accepted,—as he always *did* accept invitations of a like kind,—‘with the sincerest pleasure in the world;’ and Lucy was just thinking that she could read upon his expressive countenance a look of satisfaction, as though at the absence of their obliging landlord, when Sarah, the parlour-maid, once more appeared in the doorway.

‘If you please, Mum,’ she said, ‘Mr. Podmore’s best compliments, and I was to say he has just returned from the Isle of Wight,—a little sooner than he was prepared for,—and, being Monday, the fishermen wasn’t not out a-Sunday, and no fresh prawns was caught, but he’s just sent round a live hen-lobster which is to be boiled for a little over half-an-hour, with his kindest regards, and he would be pleased to know whether he might look in after his dinner if you and Miss Lucy happened to be disengaged?’

‘We shall be very pleased, indeed, to see Mr. Podmore,’ said Miss Elizabeth, cheerfully; ‘so pray say, Sarah, with our compliments, that we are quite disengaged this evening, and that we hope he will look in at about nine o’clock. . . . But stay! I was writing to Mr. Podmore in the

Isle of Wight. The letter is there, Sarah ; deliver it to Mr. Podmore's servant instead of taking it to the post.'

Miss Elizabeth withdrew in order to see that there was no mistake about the letter.

'Ah ! that magnificent Podmore !' exclaimed the Professor, as soon as she was out of hearing.  
'*Dire qu'il a de la chance !* He introduces himself by means of the drains,—he pleases through the bursting of a kitchen-boiler,—his means of seduction is a live lobster which is to be boiled for more than half-an-hour !'

'With his kindest regards,' added Lucy, smiling.

'With his kindest regards,' repeated de la Vieilleroche, contemptuously ; 'and so he has returned from his Isle of Wight "sooner than he was prepared for," and has spoilt our pleasant evening !'

## CHAPTER III.

AFTER hearing Miss Elizabeth Barlow talk, one might really come to imagine that the Barlow family,—in the way of distinction,—had been something positively abnormal. It is true that all the great, illustrious Barlows seemed to have lived a very long while ago, and they appear to have had a sad habit of shedding their glories and honours as they advanced towards modern times, so that the most recent Barlow was always less affluent and influential than his predecessor.

Miss Elizabeth had collected manuscripts, genealogical-trees, and volumes by obscure authors, wherein many of her ancestors' dignities,—‘deeds of derring-do,’ &c., &c., were actually set down and printed in black and white, for, upon this subject, she was like Captain Toby Shandy as to his fortifications, positively ‘hobbyhorsical.’

Of the first Barlow no mention was made in these writings, for the simple reason that, being

prehistoric, nobody knew how to take a note of his doings. But that he must have selected and over-come a pre-historic female of some sort, got together, and acknowledged, his offspring, and recognised the sanctity of the domestic circle, is evident from the fact that, towards the close of the third century (A.D.) we read of ' Cadrod,'—a mighty chieftain settled in North Cambria, and who was only not a king because kings had yet to be evolved. He married Gwladys-ap-Brogyntryn,—related to an ancestor of one of the Princes of North Wales—a union which was evidently blessed with children, since, in 1096, we have 'Geoffry' (their descendant) who held forty-seven hides of land from Montacute, lord of Gormansbury, and who was created Baron de Barlow, (*temp. William Rufus,*) 'with remainder to the heirs male of his body lawfully begotten.' By about the time of Richard Cœur de Lion, however, the Barlows had succeeded in completely sloughing away their hides, together with the Barony, although we find that they were still available for the dignity of knighthood. Sir Percival, Sir Borlase, and Sir Humphrey de Barlow here follow one another in somewhat quick succession; and the antiquarian,—could

he only discover their tombstones,—would, no doubt, be led to infer,—from the crossed legs of the effigies thereon, that they had been one and all of them Crusaders.

With Griffinhoofe, Abbot of St. Opportune (*temp. Henry VIII.*), one might have fancied that any ordinary family would have come to an end. But then, we must remember, first, that he was a ‘*Lay*’-Abbot, and, secondly, that there was nothing ordinary about the family of Barlow.

At any rate, it was from this point that Miss Elizabeth,—sitting, as it were, well back in the saddle and hugging the third pummel with her left knee,—had taken one of those grand genealogical leaps which are apt by their audacity to astonish the modern student of pedigrees. She landed somewhere in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and lo ! we find that, like degenerate game-cocks, the Barlows have shed their spurs ! . . . In a word, the family has merged and centred in the person of one ‘John Barlow, Esquire, of Lesser Pucklington, Bucks;—engaged in commerce,’ who, having selected, and subdued his female, became in due course of time, the father of Captain William Barlow, of the Royal Navy, who pre-deceased his father, in the year

1860, at the comparatively early age of forty, soon after he had ‘lawfully begotten,’ through the medium of a somewhat imprudent marriage, the Miss Lucy Barlow of this story. Now, Captain William Barlow of the Royal Navy,—being one of those provokingly practical persons who set up facts before faith, and seem to require to test every kind of revelation, as it were, with a foot-rule,—had utterly and entirely repudiated all the great, illustrious, mediæval Barlows, declaring that they had nothing whatever to do with *him*, and that the notion that they were in any way connected with the family was simply an immaculate conception of his aunt, Miss Elizabeth,—only sister of ‘John Barlow, Esquire, engaged in commerce’),—who, having discovered in an old curiosity-shop a large signet-ring, engraved with a lion rampant, flourishing a battle-axe (the cognizance, as everybody knows, of the genuine mediæval Barlows), had constructed therefrom a sort of phenomenal Megatherium, fearfully and wonderfully made, to be regarded altogether with ridicule and mistrust, and deserving of no place in the classified order of things. By reason of this deeply-rooted incredulity the Captain had refrained from christening his little daughter by any of the grand, old,

high-sounding, North Cambrian, Norman, or Plantagenet names. She was neither a Bronwyn, an Eleanora, nor a Rosamund; but simply 'Lucy,' from 'Lux,' signifying a light. The Captain's own light, however, was extinguished before he could ascertain whether she was,—or was not,—destined to live up to her name; and, as her mother had died upon giving her birth, the task of solving this question has devolved upon the present writer.

The connecting link between the late and early Barlows did, indeed, seem to be rather vague and unsubstantial, but even the possessors of Lesser Pucklington were said to have been, in many ways, remarkable and distinguished. According to Miss Elizabeth, they had been endowed with numerous characteristic idiosyncracies, upon which she was never tired of expatiating, and poor Lucy was scarcely able to perform the simplest movement, without being informed that she had inherited the 'Barlow stride,' or the 'Barlow twitch,' or the 'Barlow shuffle,' and she seemed to be for ever unconsciously reproducing fresh traits. It had been a custom with these comparatively recent Barlows to poke the fire in a somewhat violent manner, to bang the door both

upon entering and leaving an apartment, to take neither anchovy-sauce with their fish, nor cayenne-pepper with their wild duck, and to utterly abhor such puddings as were made either of sago or tapioca ; and all these peculiarities Lucy was supposed to have inherited with her name.

In her outward demeanour, however, there was nothing to recall the flourishers of the heraldic battle-axe, the impetuous fire-pokers and door-bangers, who had combined together to produce her. That she was extremely well favoured by Nature, it was impossible to deny, although she possessed that sort of beauty which is directly opposed to either the classical or the heroic. A face with brown hair, brown eyes, and a general effect of having had its shadows, and marked points, painted in in sepia ; not unlike, in its expression of tenderness and resignation, the face of Beatrice Cenci in the well-known picture,— barring, of course, the table-napkin which Guido has thought fit to wrap round the head of that most interesting of parricides. Her manners and movements were, usually, extremely graceful and quiet, for the hereditary stridings, twitchings, and shufflings, were perceptible to Miss Elizabeth Barlow alone. She conversed, unless when con-

fronted with any untoward event, with meekness and deliberation, as became an orphan in modest circumstances, ignorant as yet of the existence of conditions capable of confusing speech or fluttering the pulses.

Lesser Pucklington having gone, somehow, the way of all the other family appanages, Lucy Barlow and her great-aunt inhabited, at the present time, a peaceful-looking Queen Anne house, upon the borders of Clapham Common, which the elder lady had rented ever since the death of her brother John, when Lucy was not more than three or four years old. Now Monsieur de la Vieilleroche, knowing Miss Elizabeth's ruling passion, and anxious in every way to please and gratify her, and being himself a fervent believer in the influence of chivalrous traditions and associations, had introduced to her a clever and impecunious Italian artist,—one Benvenuto Rossi by name, an old friend of his own,—who, for a trifling consideration, had set down and illuminated the whole Barlow genealogy, from beginning to end, upon the very finest parchment. The great illustrious early Barlows, with their knightly cognizances, were all faithfully portrayed, the names of sire and dame being written beneath their

respective shields and lozenges, which were connected together by a hyphen, from the centre of which branched forth their offspring—male and female. From the original parchment this family record had, afterwards, been considerably enlarged, and transferred to some sort of holland fabric, suitable for blinds, and it now hung suspended from the lower staircase window at Barlow Lodge, where the sunlight, streaming through the ‘gules,’ ‘azure,’ ‘vert,’ and ‘sable,’ of the painted scutcheons, had quite an imposing effect upon fine afternoons, and could not fail to attract the attention of any visitor who happened to linger in the entrance-hall. Upon such days, however, as were grey and cheerless,—of which there are but too many in our chilly clime,—the blind, thus richly emblazoned with heraldic devices, was almost entirely drawn up, so as to admit as much light as possible to the staircase. The names and cognizances of the illustrious mediæval Barlows would then be coiled up and concealed upon the roller of the blind, and only about half a foot of the holland fabric was revealed to the eyes of the beholder. But, here-upon, level with the hem, and immediately above the knot belonging to the tassel, was set down

quite the most interesting portion of the record. It was the space reserved for the Barlows of Lesser Pucklington, of which Lucy was now the sole remaining modern offshoot. Her name and arms were,—of course,—duly recorded, springing from the hyphen which united ‘Captain William Barlow, of the Royal Navy,’ with ‘Lucinda, his wife, only daughter of the Rev. Orlando Binks’; but the cunning artist,—seeking, no doubt, to ingratiate himself with his patrons,—had refused obstinately to believe, or so he had pretended, that so fascinating a young lady as Lucy could possibly remain much longer in her present un-hyphened condition. He had, therefore, united her to the shadowy semblance of a scutcheon, sketched in pencil only, without as yet, either cognizance or written name, but which could be easily filled up and completed when occasion required. And passing up and down stairs, as Lucy was accustomed to pass, at least eight, or nine, or ten, or even a dozen times, in the course of one day, it was quite impossible for her—although she was neither vain, nor self-centred, nor discontented, nor too femininely over-fanciful,—to look, thus often, at this empty scutcheon, to which she had been, as it were, affianced,—by the artist’s courtesy,

—without wondering, and wondering, and wondering, *whose* name might be destined, one day, to be inscribed beneath its outlines ; or, whether, indeed, there would ever be any name inscribed there at all ! . . . Of course the Marquis's poor Italian friend meant no harm whatever by his flattering conceit ; but I think that had *I* been Miss Lucy Barlow's venerable great-aunt, and had I desired that my great-nicce's mind should be kept free from all such wandering fancies, I would have set his foolish ears a-tingling before I would have permitted him to sketch in that phantom shield !

## CHAPTER IV.

SYDNEY ADOLPHUS PODMORE, of Palmyra House, was one of those favoured individuals who give the lie to a popular adage. He was ‘a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*.’ Mr. Hitchens, a grave, grey, elderly man, who, it was surmised, might once have known better days, apparently looked upon his master as a living concentration of power, urbanity, magnificence. A benevolent sun-god, perpetually lavishing his favours upon those who were in need of them; and even when one of these took the rather prosaic form of a live lobster,—firmly manacled, and wrapped up in the latest edition of the *Daily Telegraph*,—the admiration of the loyal valet underwent no sort of diminution.

‘My Guv’nor’s sent this round for the two ladies’ (he had said when he delivered over the creature into Sarah’s hands). ‘She’s to be boiled

a little better than half-an-hour with his kindest regards ; and I s'pose, my dear, as he may drop in upon 'em in the evening, when he's finished his dinner? . . . . He'd have sent 'em prawns, as well, if the fishing-boats had been out a-Sunday, which they was not. . . . Ah! my girl, if everybody upon this earth were given their correct dues, that master of mine ought to have been a born Prince ! ' and herewith he had handed her the hen-lobster and departed with a sigh.

And indeed, Mr. Podmore was possessed of many of the attributes which go towards the making of a popular idol, his magnificence being of that surface kind which appeals directly to the vulgar. In the first place, he was large, easily observed, profuse in his cellar and stable expenditure, very particular as to his liveries, and scrupulously careful with regard to his own personal attire. He was as highly jewelled as any Englishman can be who has any sort of regard for public opinion ; and yet, over all there reigned a simplicity, a chastity, a perfection of refined taste ! That single pearl—for instance, which shimmered nightly upon his manly bosom, —and what a pearl it was !—might, alone, have furnished an imaginative mind with the materials

for a stirring romance. Pearls may not speak, but this one, at least, was eloquent in its proud silence. The same distinguished simplicity was observable in his equipage. '*Chaste*' is again the term which will best describe it, if chastity is a virtue which may belong to a single-brougham. Not even armorial bearings upon the panel, nor a cockade upon the coachman's hat; what an evidence of power in reserve!

Miss Barlow the elder,—with her craving after heraldic-blazon,—had been somewhat disturbed with regard to this first omission.

'But surely, dear Mr. Podmore,' she had protested, 'the Podmores of Middlesex,—they must be entitled to bear arms?'

'They are, indeed,' Mr. Podmore had answered, 'and we have quite a fine motto, I can assure you; something war-like and defiant: "*Let Podmore hold what Podmore held,*"—something of that kind! All these things are very well for you ladies,—but I prefer, myself, to have my belongings marked simply with my initials, "S. A. P."—"Sydney Adolphus Podmore." It spells "*sap*," too,—a word with a grand significance.'

He had said this with such a 'good-wine-needs-

no-bush' kind of a manner, that Miss Elizabeth was at once reassured.

'*Sap*,' (Mr. Podmore had continued,) 'is the essence, the grand vital principle of all animate nature;—without "sap" the flower droops, the tree withers, man himself perishes,—England,—the greatest commercial power upon the face of the globe,—could not exist for one single moment if it were not for "sap"!'

And so Sydney Adolphus Podmore would have no crest upon his carriages or spoons, although the poor gnomes of the Ural were still delving and toiling, in order to discover a fellow to his one enormous turquoise, which, when appropriately paired, was to furnish him with sleeve-buttons; and whilst the bare-legged Neapolitan fisher was still diving and dredging in the hope of finding the very palest, priceliest, piece of pink coral, as a handle for his new umbrella!

Upon the day of his return from the Isle of Wight, Mr. Podmore presented himself at Barlow Lodge punctually at nine o'clock. He entered the house with a good deal of effusive bustle, banging the doors almost as noisily as the legendary Barlows, and greeting Sarah with a few hearty condescending words in the entrance-

hall. He advanced towards Miss Elizabeth with the greatest cordiality, flourishing his cambric pocket-handkerchief, which immediately filled the apartment with delicious perfume. Sarah, who lingered admiringly in the doorway, quite agreed with Mr. Hitchens, as to the proud position which his master would have occupied supposing that everybody had obtained their 'correct dues.'

A few words about Mr. Podmore's personal appearance may not be out of place here.

He was in the habit of alluding to himself, in conversation, as a person who, without being actually handsome, was possessed of that manly, 'British-Lion' kind of exterior, which is calculated to inspire confidence at a glance : whilst, at the same time, he was wont to insinuate that every other type of masculine good-looks went for less than nothing, and was, indeed, often an indication and accompaniment of the most dangerous forms of immorality.

'I can assure you, my dear Miss Barlow,' he would remark, as he surveyed his portly form in the chimney-glass, 'I would far rather be what I am,—plain-headed, and I trust you will allow me to add, "*true-hearted*" Sydney Podmore, with his bluff, outspoken manner, and punctual, matter-

of-fact business habits, than the smartest and handsomest young fellow that ever ogled a ballet-girl in the green-room of a London Theatre, or dissipated his patrimony upon a race-course, amongst blacklegs and sharpers! . . . . There's no accounting for tastes, is there?'

Upon which, Miss Elizabeth Barlow, shrinking appalled from this picture of the habits of 'smart and handsome young fellows,' would invariably make answer that *she*, too, would far rather that 'Sydney Podmore' remained as he was.

Mr. Podmore, then, was large, pale, and inclining towards fatness. As compared to most other men he presented to Lucy the appearance of having been cast in a mould, rather than hewn or chiselled; but then, as yet, she had seen very few other men with whom to compare him. In spite, however, of a pair of floating red whiskers—certainly rather a leonine attribute—she had never taken the 'British-Lion' view of his individuality. He did not look athletic enough, she thought, although he was so big and so important, and took up so much room when he sat down. He was not brown enough, nor weather-beaten enough, nor addicted enough to out-of-door pur-

suits. ‘British Lions’ did not sit all day long in office-arm-chairs, and drive home in ‘chaste’ broughams to well-cooked dinners in suburban villas! They prowled about all over the world, seeking whom they might devour, and came home with their skins tanned by sun and scarred by battle. As it was, however, only the preciseness of Mr. Podmore’s attire saved him, at times, from looking positively vulgar. One felt that it would have been impossible to contemplate him, without disgust, if he had been either over-heated, dishevelled, or unshaved, and that all classical adaptations of drapery would have been unbecoming to him. Lucy had seen persons with faces like his, hurrying along with large parcels, lounging about the doors of public-houses, and perched upon the knife-boards of omnibuses. In a word, he seemed to her to be essentially common-looking:—a face so often seen that one hardly took the trouble to observe it, and never allowed one’s self to think about it at all.

Upon this particular evening, however, the Podmorian brow was unusually radiant. Miss Elizabeth, who would not have admitted that he was ever plain, might well have considered that to-night he was positively handsome. He was

fatigued however, he said, with a long day of steamers, trains, and cabs. He had left the Isle of Wight at an early hour, and had travelled direct to London, for he was due soon after 12.30 at one of his City ‘boards.’ He had passed Clapham Junction on his way, where Mr. Hitchens and the hen-lobster had alighted, and whither he had returned later on in the day, for, as he was a little uncertain as to his plans, he had not ordered his brougham to meet him as usual. He had hurried from the station to Palmyra House as fast as a ‘hansom’ would carry him, dressed, dined, dispatched half-a-dozen business letters, and here he was, at 9 p.m., beaming, shining, magnificent. What must he have been in the morning! . . .

‘And the childie?’ he inquired suddenly, after he had given this detailed account of his peregrinations. It was fortunate, perhaps, that Lucy was not present to hear this remark. The words ‘childie,’ ‘bairnie,’ ‘birdie,’ ‘*bonnie*,’ even, half Burns’s vocabulary, in fact, when employed by persons who were not Scotch, had always inspired her with an uncontrollable sensation of nausea, so that ‘*childie*’ might have weighed seriously against Mr. Podmore in the balance. What squeamish, unreasonable creatures we women

are! . . . and then to pretend that we could ever legislate and help to govern the country! . . .

'The Marquis has been dining here,' Miss Barlow explained. 'He has gone into the garden to smoke a cigar, as I have never permitted smoking in the house, and Lucy is walking with him. Tell me, dear Mr. Podmore, whilst we are alone, have you received and read my last letter?'

'I have,' replied Mr. Podmore, drawing himself up, and patting himself complacently about the region of the priceless pearl. 'I have considered it most attentively, and I look upon our little financial speculation as entirely at an end.'

'Why at an end?' asked the old lady, looking a little taken aback.

'Because,' returned Mr. Podmore, 'I gather from your letter—courteous and considerate although it be—that you have misinterpreted my motives. You imagined that I desired you to embark with me in this advantageous speculation in order, principally, to benefit myself. When I suggested that you should contribute towards the purchase-money of the valuable estate about which I spoke to you, you were under the impression that I was actually in want of this augmentation of funds; that I should be unable

to obtain the property without your assistance ; and this very naturally made you a little mistrustful . . .'

'Oh, *indeed*, you are quite wrong !' protested Miss Elizabeth eagerly. 'It is *you* who misinterpret ! Not the slightest shadow of mistrust has ever entered my mind ! But I have, I must confess, rather a horror of speculations ; my poor dear brother John, as I think I have told you, having everything in the world to make him perfectly happy, embarked in speculations—speculations that did not turn out as he had expected. Wealthy as he had been originally, he died in quite reduced circumstances, the greater portion of my own fortune went in endeavouring to satisfy his creditors ; and dear Lucy, who being now the last of her race, ought to have been quite an heiress, will have to depend entirely upon my reduced fortune and the savings I have been providentially enabled to set aside during a long lifetime. You see, therefore, my dear Mr. Podmore, why I was a little averse to altering the arrangement I had made with regard to this money ?'

'I see *everything* ! Your scruples are perfectly natural. My own wish, too, to see these savings of yours roll up, and double and treble themselves,

was only the very natural wish of a sincere friend who has hopes of becoming one day connected with your family by nearer and dearer ties. Pray believe me when I say that my motives were perfectly disinterested, and now we will say no more upon the subject !'

'If I might only consult with somebody about the matter,' said Miss Elizabeth timidly. 'I am so exceedingly ignorant about investments, and my poor brother's misfortunes have naturally made me a little nervous. You did not like the notion of my speaking to Mr. Fletcher, my solicitor ?'

'For this reason,' interrupted Mr. Podmore quickly. 'Fletcher himself has been speculating in land in this neighbourhood. He would give his eyes, as I happen to know, for the property in question, and would be certain, therefore, to do all that he could to interfere with my purchase of it. It would be impossible for you to consult him without entering into full particulars, and the more advantageous the investment the more sore he would be about the matter. It might produce endless troubles and complications in the future. My objection upon this head was, therefore, perfectly natural.'

' You see,' said Miss Elizabeth sadly, ' I have now so very few gentlemen friends; I am an old woman, those who could have advised me are dead and gone ! ' She paused, sighing, and then added suddenly, ' I wonder, dear Mr. Podmore, as I feel so utterly helpless and ignorant with regard to this matter, although I should embark in it at once merely upon your kind recommendation, if I considered that the money was really my own, whether I might consult my old friend Monsieur de la Vieilleroche ? He is devoted to dear Lucy's interests, and, besides being a gentleman in every sense, he is such a thorough man of the world ? '

' I can have no objection,' replied Mr. Podmore with dignity, ' that you should speak to him with regard to my views respecting the dear childie, but I shall consider that our little joint speculation scheme is utterly at an end, and I should wish no allusion made to it, therefore, to a person who is probably totally unacquainted with English systems of investment. Had the Marquis been a younger man, I might have hesitated with respect to this private matter also, for there is something a little "Frenchy" and cynical about him, which might have made me mistrust his advice. As it is, however, he is an old friend of yours, he seems

to have the dear girl's interest thoroughly at heart, and there can be no reason, therefore, why he should not be made a party to our arrangement. It will account to him for the frequency of my visits, and for the interest I take in all matters relating to you both. I have fancied, sometimes, that he was a little jealous of my influence and friendship.'

Before anything more could be said upon this matter the 'dear childie' herself appeared, looking very pretty and innocent in a white frock and mittens. Monsieur de la Vieilleroche entered the room soon afterwards from the garden, arrayed—as he always *was* arrayed—beneath the folds of a melodramatic-looking fur-collared cloak, in a well-worn dress suit and embroidered evening shirt, convenient for the accepting of unexpected invitations to dinner which might happen to be made during an afternoon call. And the four friends settled down at once to their evening rubber, which was enlivened between whiles by the old Frenchman's vivacious prattle, and by Mr. Podmore's improving talk, diversified by some interesting anecdotes of London 'high life' which he had picked up that very morning at his City board.

## CHAPTER V.

To the lover of romance there will seem, as I have already hinted, to be nothing very seductive, at the first, in the notion of Clapham Common. A common far removed from the busy haunts of men,—pink with heather, and feathery with bracken,—where one can hear the blithe morning-song of the lark and the shrill ‘pee-wit!’ of the plover, and where the rabbits, with their little tufted tails, go scurrying away headlong in every direction,—is calculated, I allow, to awaken dreams as varied as its own sunsets. It conveys an idea of Freedom, of Immensity, of Expectation; and possesses thus some points of resemblance with the very Ocean itself. One may see the pink heather trampled down by the feet of merry birds’-nesters and blackberry-pickers; by the swart gipsy, with his shock-headed brood, his vans, his laden asses, his cheap and trumpery

wares ; whilst lark, plover, and rabbit, alike, may be well-nigh scared out of their senses, at times, by the sudden clattering past of a troop of horse, or by the fierce crackling flames of an incendiary fire.

But *Clapham Common ! . .*

Clapham Common, I am bound to admit, is chiefly suggestive of ideas connected with the retired butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers, who are supposed to inhabit most of the houses upon its confines ;—with the ‘Junction,’ its shrieking steam-engines, pert young bar-maids, and hard ham-sandwiches ;—with the ‘desirable villa residences’ upon the way leading to it, situated between an enormous gasometer and a space devoted to the airing of infected blankets, and bounded by the railway on the off-side ; and with that accursed tramway which,—like ‘Swastika’ the Great Serpent,—‘drags its slow length along,’ and threatens to overrun every available roadway in our suburbs.

Clapham Common, however, like many other places, persons, and things, only reveals its delights and its mysteries to the seeker. It possesses its bards, its chroniclers, its ardent and enthusiastic lovers. The demure-looking Queen-

Anne houses which encircle it may seem to their varied inmates even as very terrestrial Edens, Havens of Calm, Sloughs of Despond, or Towers of Silence. Love, Death, Imagination, and the Penny Post, have access to them all, and the dramas which have been enacted in them might, very likely, fill many volumes, if written down.

Barlow Lodge, with its modest eighteenth-century decorations, partook most of the character of a Haven of Calm. Storm-tossed mementos of foreign travel had found their way thither, it is true. Coral-sprays, from the depths of tropic seas, which had been brought home by Lucy's father, Captain William Barlow of the Royal Navy, stood under crystal globes upon several of the spidery-legged Chippendale tables. It must have been the Captain, too, who had contributed those weird-looking Australian boomerangs which were hung up in the entrance-hall, and the ostrich-egg in its silken net, against which Miss Elizabeth was always afraid that Mr. Podmore would bump his head; and the carved ivory chessmen that were set out upon the red Chinese tea-tray, and the mother-of-pearl counters which were wont to be made use of during the evening rubber of whist.

' Then, what a goodly wealth of shells,  
Gleaned from the secret ocean-cells  
Of half the seas that wash the world ! . . .  
Horn'd, and pyramidal, and curl'd,  
Like worm or dragon of olden time,—  
Wide-mouthed, and moss'd with the ocean-rime :  
And oblong,—polished smooth and hard,  
Huge cowries,—spotted " like the pard,"  
Wherein,—when held against mine ear  
Attentively,—I seem to hear  
The wild Atlantic's distant roar  
Whilst sitting here in mine easy chair ! '

These great sea-shells had also probably been brought home by Lucy's father, but there were besides the contributions of 'John Barlow, Esquire, engaged in commerce,' which had been transferred, after his decease, from the mansion of Lesser Pucklington. The profiles of himself and lady, neatly cut out in black paper, set in black frames, wherefrom it would not have been easy to form any idea of their personal appearance ; and other portraits of the same individuals when younger, modelled in light wax, upon a dark ground, after the manner of a cameo. Also, the portrait, likewise in black paper, of a mysterious Naval Officer, wearing his cocked hat, 'athwart-ships,' which was treated by Miss Elizabeth with an especial reverence, although she had

never informed Lucy who it was intended to represent. Then, quaint, fluted, Wedgwood and Swansea tea-sets, arranged upon brackets and corner shelves, and some fine old Oriental ginger-pots and pickle-jars, filled up now with *pot-pourri* and dried lavender buds. Last, but not least, there was the Grand Hereditary Barlow Great Seal, about which Miss Elizabeth had quite a feeling of 'fetish.' It was very large and bloated-looking,—as things much pampered and pandered to have a tendency to become,—set in a fine old ring of red gold, and the heraldic lion rampant, with his upraised battle-axe, were beautifully engraved upon dark cornelian. It was disposed in the centre of a quilted satin mat upon the show writing-table, encircled and hemmed in by several smaller and less-considered objects, in the form of pencil-cases, vinaigrettes, and snuff-boxes, which all appeared to be backing and salaaming before it, as though to some sort of sacred Llama. It had occupied its present proud position ever since Lucy could remember, and, on no account, would either she or Sarah have ventured to displace it by so much as what Sterne calls 'the breadth of an hair.' From time to time Miss Barlow the elder would take it up and dust it

with reverential fingers, looking at it the while with an expression of regretful melancholy, as much as to say, ‘Thou art the last link, oh seal, that binds us to our grand old historical recollections! Never, therefore, shalt thou be mocked at or shamefully entreated!’ and she would heave a sigh as she set it up again in the midst of the seeming idolators. With the exception of this great family heir-loom, the origin of which was apparently lost in the mists of antiquity,—for, of course, Captain William Barlow’s theory about its having been purchased by his aunt at a pawnbroker’s shop could only have sprung from his possessing too practical a mind,—the decorations and associations of Barlow Lodge were old-fashioned rather than mediaeval. There was nothing in the house which had been much longer in the family than the profiles fashioned out of wax and black paper; for, although the large blue Oriental pickle-jars may have dated back to the very first brick of the great wall of China, they had been purchased, as was well known, by the father of ‘John Barlow, Esquire, engaged in commerce,’ not more than a hundred years ago.

All these seemingly incongruous objects ap-

peared now to have settled themselves for good. They had become a part and parcel of Barlow Lodge, which would not have been like Barlow Lodge without them ; and perhaps it was this mute obedience to the decrees of fate, upon the part of these inanimate chattels, which made Miss Elizabeth's modest suburban dwelling so essentially a 'Haven of Calm' to its living and breathing inmates.

*Without*, too, upon the side, at least, which did not overlook the Common, it inspired the same sensations of resignation and repose. About midway down the narrow strip of garden, a medlar-tree, seeming all knees and elbows by reason of the sharp angles in its branches, some bay and box-trees, and a few tufted bushes of rhododendron, made quite a patch of sylvan shade upon the greensward. Sitting here, in her garden chair, upon still summer afternoons, with her back turned to the wall above which towered the stuccoed mansion of her influential neighbour, Lucy could almost imagine herself in the depths of the 'forest primeval ;' for a vagabond clematis, wandering about at will, had so loaded one of the dark bay-trees with its white blossoms and invading horned tendrils, that the prospect on the

left-hand side of the garden was almost entirely masked. Starlings, thrushes, robins, real country birds, came here, as well as the pert chimney-pot sparrows, to peck at the moss growing under the gnarled limbs of the medlar-tree, which must have taken a century, at least, to become so velvety and soft. Butterflies, too, would come and settle upon the blossoms of the clematis, not only our old friend the ‘cabbage white,’ but many of the brighter and scarcer varieties, and, at eventide, the darting ‘gamma moth’ and whirring ‘yellow underwing.’ In a word, whilst the weather was warm and fine, and whilst the branches of the medlar-tree were well shrouded in leaves, this nook seemed to Lucy to be quite like the ‘real country,’ sitting, of course, in one particular position, without allowing the eyes to wander too much to the right or the left.

It was strange that so small a garden should have been able to satisfy such a roving imagination, or that there should have seemed to be room in it for all the many aerial castles that Lucy was accustomed to build! Perhaps, however, it is only the really imaginative that can set to work thus between two narrow walls, and follow out their wonderful day-dreams, as though uncon-

scious altogether of their commonplace surroundings. Things, and places, and people, influence us much more through what we make of them than through what they really are ; and so Lucy—guided entirely by her own powers of idealization—had misnamed this poor little handful of suburban evergreens ‘the Jungle.’ It was a Jungle, to be sure, safe from the inroads of savage wild beasts ; but yet, at times, a sound would reach it which was not altogether unlike the distant roaring of lions, and which filled Lucy with some such sense of awe and apprehension as is said to be inspired by the voice of the monarch of the desert. This awe-striking sound was no other than the distant murmur of London. London—the mighty, murky, unknown power, that lay crouched between her and the sunset, and about which she had heard such wonderful stories, both of good and of evil.

It was chiefly from her great-aunt, and from, Mr. Podmore, that Lucy had heard these stories about London ; for, notwithstanding that she lived so close upon its confines, she had been there but seldom, and the longest time she ever remembered to have remained in its brumous atmosphere was when she had paid a visit to the dentist who

had extracted her two first-permanent-bicusped-molars—(I have reason to think that I have got the name and style of this tooth quite correctly)—in order to allow the requisite space for her canine teeth ;—and this was, of course, a good many years ago now.

Miss Elizabeth Barlow, in fact, possessed the same sort of acquaintance with the great world of London, as the old apple-woman at the corner of a street has been said to possess of its varied inhabitants. There have been controversies as to whether this old woman, who so seldom moves from her position upon the kerb-stone, or the hurrying errand-boy, who is admitted, at times, into the very houses themselves, knows most about what is really going on, and I believe that the verdict has been given in favour of the apple-woman.

For the knowledge acquired by the hurrying errand-boy is purely superficial, and he is, besides, both young and unobservant. It is true that he may dash down the area-steps of some one particular house upon some one very particular day—the day of an auspicious event. A brougham and pair is at the door,—the coachman is asleep,—he does not wear a cockade,—and there is no footman ; but for all this the errand-boy knows not

that it is the equipage of one of the most celebrated of Her Majesty's physicians, in one particular department. He may run up against, perhaps, and well-nigh overset, a middle-aged female bearing a tray with caudle in a pipkin ; but the ignorant boy is not aware that this is the 'wily nurse,' and that the birth of the son, who has just come into the world, will elate one branch of a noble family with triumph, and set some other members of it wailing and gnashing their teeth.

Or again, he may come to deliver his message upon the day of a wedding. The voice of the family butler is husky, and his face unusually flushed ; strange men loiter upon the staircase, and innumerable clusters of empty wine-glasses encumber the dresser ; but the errand-boy knows not that the bride has just driven off with her husband, for he was in too great a hurry to observe that old white satin shoe in the gutter, or the grains of rice which were strewn upon the area-steps as he ran clattering down them.

Or, he may call, perchance, at the door of yet another mansion. The coffin of its wealthy master has just been borne down into the lobby, and the assembled servants are craning over one

another's shoulders to read the inscription upon the coffin-plate, whilst waiting for the dismal carriage which is to take him for his last drive; a fluttering, as of a bird, in the letter-box, disturbs the awed silence; the errand-boy has just delivered himself of an enormous card, whereupon the dead man is invited to assist at an important political banquet in the course of the ensuing week—('an answer particularly requested'),—and dashes off again, whistling, upon his mad career.

But now how different it is with the old apple-woman!

From her vantage ground at the street corner, she has perceived, by many little indications—not to be mistaken by an intelligent observer,—that the childless lady was expecting an heir. She has noticed the attentions of the husband, the brougham of the celebrated physician, and has watched the arrival of the 'wily nurse' with her hair-trunk. Whilst the constantly-recurring visits of an over-dressed youth at another house in the same street, together with the bales of millinery which have been delivered at the door, prepared her for the marriage of the maiden long before the arrival of the bride-cake, or of the myrmidons in charge of the hired wine-glasses.

Then, again, she has observed signs of 'the beginning of the end' in the owner of the other mansion,—his flabby, dyspeptic appearance, his irritability to his cabmen, the languor of his step as he strolled forth for his morning walk in the park. He gave her half-a-crown, too, the last time she pestered him for coppers, which no one in the full enjoyment of his faculties had ever done before; the end was clearly foreshadowed.

After some such fashion, Miss Elizabeth Barlow, with the help of a superannuated 'Peerage,' had followed conscientiously the movements of the British aristocracy for years. In this honoured volume, whose ruddy hue had become a good deal paled by time, she would carefully notch down the birth of the little heir, the marriage of the maiden, and the death of the wealthy householder; for I am supposing them all to have been scions of noble houses.

Ordinary knights she looked upon as somewhat beneath her notice, but she kept a keen eye upon the baronets, so long as they were neither doctors nor lord-mayors, and did not utterly despise a military K.C.B., supposing, of course, that he had gained several victories, and had come of a good old family at starting.

Mr. Podmore was at times perfectly astounded at the extent of her information, which seemed to him to partake almost of the supernatural.

His own experience of great people had been much more of the errand-boy kind. He had a nodding acquaintance with one or two 'big-wigs' who sat with him upon the Board of an insurance company. His name had appeared, too, as the promoter of an enterprise in which the third son of a Duke was also concerned, and this young aristocrat had even addressed him familiarly as 'Podmore,' and slapped him cordially upon the back. A 'Viscount,' too, of insinuating manners and address, whom he had fallen in with, quite by accident, in the waiting-room of a Jewish usurer, had condescended to allow him to 'stand' him luncheon at his City club, and had afterwards done him the favour to accept one of his most expensive cigars, but he had never been admitted by these, or other great personages, to any sort of intimacy, and he was too much occupied with his own business matters to take note of their births, deaths, and marriages, or to read about them when they were taken note of in the newspapers. Still, between Miss Elizabeth and Mr. Podmore, some wonderful stories of

'high life' had reached Lucy's innocent ears—wonderful, as compared to the total absence of all wonders at Barlow Lodge.

Only upon this very evening, for instance, Mr. Podmore had related an anecdote connected with the fashionable world, which possessed all the materials suitable for a three-volumed novel. A noble Earl, who was to have presided at Mr. Podmore's Board, was absent from his appointed place, and this was the 'reason wherefore':—

Lady Valentina de Bohun, only daughter,—only child, in fact,—of the venerable Earl of Rottingdean, had long been attached to her father's favourite physician. The doctor returned her affection, but, dreading the anger of the lady's venerable though haughty father, neither of them avowed their love. The doctor had attended the Lady Valentina for measles, whooping-cough, scarlatina,—every juvenile complaint,—from which not even blue blood is exempt. To the ailments of youth succeeded the disorders of maturity, and still the noble-hearted doctor was content to be silent, although his flame was thus being perpetually fanned.

But at last Lady Valentina, whose susceptible nature somewhat pre-disposed her to infection,

was stricken down with the smallpox. The doctor attended her, of course, and only succeeded in pulling her through by a miracle. One thing, however, even *his* skill and devotion was powerless to preserve, *her* beauty,—(never of a very high order, by-the-by). She was disfigured for life! . . . Then, and not till then,—when all prospect of making a more brilliant alliance seemed to be gone from her for ever,—did the disinterested physician apply to the Earl of Rottingdean for the hand of his daughter. He was peremptorily refused; and this after having saved the life of the lady, and enjoyed for years the family confidence! It was more than flesh and blood could stand. The Leech and the Lady, therefore, determined to take the law into their own hands.

They walked out one morning before breakfast, and were married; and this fact had only just been made known to the outraged parent. What form his indignation would eventually take, remained still a mystery. It had prevented him, at any rate, from being able to attend at Mr. Podmore's Board.

'It is a shocking disgrace for her family,' Miss Elizabeth had remarked when she heard the story.

'Which do you look upon as the disgrace, my dear lady?' asked Mr. Podmore. 'Her attachment to the doctor, or her running away with him?'

'Her attachment *and* her running away,' answered the old lady promptly; 'to be sure, had she been in a more humble walk of life, the marriage in itself might have been suitable enough; but, as it is, there is a great difference in position, and Dr. Winnington would have been happier, I should have thought, with some one belonging to his own sphere. A daughter, however, who can take such a step without the sanction of her father, or of the persons who represent him, would be disgracing herself even were she to elope with a duke. It is not likely that there will be a blessing upon such a marriage.'

'I confess,' returned Mr. Podmore, 'that, whilst strongly disapproving of elopements, I can't help thinking that it is the doctor who has the worst of the bargain. The lady, I hear, is not particularly young; she was never beautiful, and is now deeply pitted with the smallpox. I presume, however, that she will be very well off?'

‘Lady Valentina de Bohun,’ replied Miss Elizabeth, who was now in her element, ‘was born on the 14th of February, 1841. I remember it, because it happens to be St. Valentine’s Day, and hence, you will perceive, her somewhat peculiar Christian name; so she is now very nearly forty years of age. Her mother, Lord Rottingdean’s first wife, died when she was quite a child, so she has been deprived for a long time of a mother’s solicitude, which should be taken into consideration now; and though the Earl, her father, afterwards re-married, his son by his second wife died before he was ten years old, which sad event was followed soon afterwards by the death of the second Countess. Lady Valentina, therefore, at her father’s decease, comes into the Castle in Sussex, and a large portion of the London property, though the title and some of the other landed estates are entailed upon her first-cousin, once removed, to whom it was hoped she would one day unite herself, and thus join together the title and the estates. Her recent imprudent act, however, has put this arrangement quite out of the question. Poor Lord Rottingdean has, indeed, had more than his own share of the troubles of this life! The event will

greatly distress your relative, Lucy, Lady Mabella Binks, who is a most intimate friend of the family, but, alas ! ' (added the old lady, sighing, and pointing her moral,) ' we do not find that persons in an exalted sphere are less chastened from on High than the most humble.'

No wonder that Mr. Podmore, who knew nothing about the existence of the pallid ' Peerage,' seemed sometimes to be almost thunderstruck at the extent of Miss Elizabeth's information with regard to great people and their doings!

## CHAPTER VI.

As Lucy sat day-dreaming in ‘the Jungle’ upon the following afternoon, she found herself thinking a good deal about this romance of the lady and the doctor, considering that she had never known either of them. Woman-like, she fell to wondering what sort of ‘outward man’ the doctor possessed. Before she had learnt that Lady Valentina was quite so old as she was, she had pictured to herself an extremely handsome and intellectual-looking young man, pale, clean-shaved, with a broad, benevolent forehead, classical features, and a rare smile, full of indescribable charm. A face and form, in fact, not unlike those of Howard the philanthropist, as he was represented in an entirely fancy-portrait which was hung up in Miss Elizabeth Barlow’s bed-room. This phantom had vanished, however, when she had heard of the lady’s mature years;

but another had started up in its place. It was the same person, perhaps, only grown a good deal older, for the face was still handsome, more intellectual, if possible, and there were still the same classical features and the rare smile. But the tall form was just a little bent now, the hair had become nearly white, and he leant upon a cane with a jewelled handle, and tested pulses by the aid of a large gold repeater watch, to which was attached a broad black watered ribbon, and a bunch of family-seals. This last conception was exceedingly like, down to the very cut of its clothes, an idealised portrait of Mr. Pitt, in mezzotint, which adorned one side of the dining-room at Barlow Lodge ; for Miss Elizabeth, as might have been expected from one possessed of her aristocratic leanings, was a most uncompromising Tory. It must be very nice, Lucy thought, to pass one's whole existence in the society of a great, good, noble, bland, benevolent being, who would cherish one, and shield one, and always give one the very best possible advice upon every occasion ! And she felt relieved to think that she would not be debarred, at any rate, by exalted rank, from dreaming about any such future possibility ! She supposed that doctors

were not *always* attending small-pox cases, cutting up dead bodies, or looking at people's tongues? . . . . *This* part of their profession must be terrible enough, in all conscience, but then, it was for the good of Science, and she had always heard that, in time, people might become used to anything!

To be sure, Mr. Bury, the local general practitioner, who had attended Miss Elizabeth during her last attack of lumbago, was not at all like the Dr. Howard-Pitt of her great-niece's imagination, but the world was wide, such noble-looking physicians were no doubt to be found in it. After all, Clapham Common was not the Universe! There were probably plenty of personages answering to this description in London! . . .

'In London!' . . . . Was it possible that London, that vast, mysterious, unknown city, would ever exercise any sort of influence upon *her* humble existence? Was it not much more probable that she would remain on here, at Clapham, looking on at it from the outside, without any change in her mode of living, until she became old, and wrinkled, and withered, like her good great-aunt Elizabeth? . . . .

As she asked herself these questions, she rose

from her chair, and sauntered down to the lower end of the garden, where, amongst what would become, later on, a maze of hollyhocks and sunflowers, a little cross-barred wicket, communicating with a meadow belonging to The Aspens, enabled her to obtain a better view of the distant mystery.

Yes, there crouched the dusky monster, with its smoky breath rising like a mist, and its crest of many spires! . . . . By-and-by, after the lamplighters had been on their rounds, it would seem to be watching her with hundreds and thousands of twinkling, malevolent eyes. As she pushed aside the intervening branches, and continued her gaze, she realised distinctly that this contemplation of London, as representing the unknown outer world, was producing upon her an impression which was far from encouraging. An impression of mistrust, of anxiety, mingling with a sense of individual helplessness and subjection of will.

A sound as of gentle wailing and sobbing attracted Lucy's attention at this moment, and served rather to confirm, than to dispel, her train of melancholy thoughts.

A child of apparently about seven or eight

years old, was leaning against the outside of the fence, close to where she was standing, and weeping bitterly. Lucy at once recognised the little daughter of the mysterious lady next door, and now that she could see her quite near, thought that she had never beheld so lovely a child. She very soon elicited the cause of her weeping. She had thrown her favourite picture-book at a white butterfly, hoping thereby to catch it, but the butterfly had flown away unscathed, and the book had fallen over the fence into Lucy's garden, and 'hence these tears.'

Sure enough, there lay the book at Lucy's feet, a book of nursery-rhymes, full of bright-coloured pictures, sprawled face downwards upon the border, a good deal crumpled and soiled ; and here was a cause for renewed lamentation. Lucy dusted the book and restored it to its little owner, towards whom she had at once experienced a peculiar sense of attraction. The feeling was evidently mutual, for the child remained still clinging to the paling as though loath to tear herself from her new friend. Lucy, though always drawn towards children, did not know very much about them in general, and she felt half afraid, at first of questioning the little stranger, lest she

should appear to her to be inquisitive. By-and-by, however, seeing that the child still lingered, she ventured to inquire her name.

'My name is little Lily,' she answered, drying her tears. 'It's written down in my book. I was called "Lily" because I was born amongst black people and came white.'

'You were born in India, I suppose?'

'Yes; but it's so long ago, and India's so far off, that I forget all about being born. My ayah, Rájama, is one of the black people from India. She says India's much bigger than Clapham.'

'I daresay she would like to go back to her own country, where it's so much warmer and brighter?'

'No; my ayah won't ever leave me, she says, not even when I'm quite old. Mamma very often tells her to go back now. "Get away, I tell you!" Mamma says to her, "Get along home, now, do; because you're no good!" But my ayah says she won't ever go.'

Lucy could not help forming an unfavourable impression of her mysterious neighbour upon hearing of this unamiable speech.

'I suppose your black nurse is very fond of you?' she said, feeling that this was not much to be wondered at.

'Yes; Mamma says fondness is making her quite silly, and that she's no business to be fond of me, because she's only a servant.'

Lucy's unfavourable impression with regard to 'Mamma,' was still further confirmed.

'No wonder,' she thought, 'that her voice sounds so shrill and unsympathetic when she sings! How can this little angel be really her child?'

Little Lily certainly resembled the typical angel of the idealistic painters, as opposed to the fat cherub of the more florid schools. She was as fair and delicate-looking as her namesake flower, whilst her eyes, although blue and innocent, had an expression of eager and unsatisfied longing, not usually to be observed in the eyes of one so young.

The black ayah, in her waving white garments, came shuffling down the garden-path, which led to the meadow, before Lucy could further improve the acquaintance with her little neighbour, and the child ran off at once in answer to her call.

After watching her out of sight, Lucy turned back towards the twisted medlar-tree, and, on her way, came upon a stray leaf of the picture-book, which had fluttered off into the midst of a

rhododendron-bush. It was the title-page, where-upon, in bold, masculine characters, the child's name was written: 'To my little Lily, from one who loves her.'

'From her father, I suppose,' Lucy said to herself, as she picked up the page, 'and I should think, from his handwriting, that he must be a much nicer person than her mamma!' And she slipped it into her apron pocket, meaning, upon the morrow, to return it to her little neighbour.

## CHAPTER VII.

BUT the morrow, as ill-luck would have it, proved wet and unpropitious, and when Lucy, after having assisted her aunt in her household duties, was about to saunter forth into the garden, ‘the pointed arrows of the rain’ were falling straight down into the hungry earth. It would do good to the country, no doubt, for the clergyman had prayed for rain, rather unkindly, Lucy could not help thinking, last Sunday in church, and the old man who looked in twice a-week to set the garden in order, a figure

‘Like Time himself, with scythe and beard,  
Who mowed the lawn, and kept it cleared  
Of twinkling daisy and blossom of grass,—’

had said that the ground was ‘downright parched up,’ and that to rake, delve, or mow, in such a drought would be a perfect mockery.

Lucy, however, never felt that she was in want

of rain. A rainy day seemed so to transform and sadden everything, down to the very colour of one's thoughts. Least of all did she want it to rain to-day. The charming little girl who 'came white' amongst the blacks, would certainly not be allowed to walk out upon the damp grass even after the rain had ceased, and, absurd as it might appear, to any one differently situated, this seemed quite like a disappointment in a life so thoroughly uneventful, so barren *even* of disappointments! In time, Lucy had said to herself, she and this little girl might have grown to love one another, even with a wooden paling between them, and it must surely be very pleasant to have anything so pretty to love!

As she stood looking out of the window, with her garden-hat slung upon her arm, she saw the old French Professor emerge from the gate of 'The Aspens.' Evidently, he had just been giving a lesson to the object of her thoughts, and was now about to pay a visit to the inmates of Barlow Lodge. Before he had time to ring the bell she would run down the garden pathway and let him in. She found the old man wrestling with a time-honoured umbrella which had suddenly played him false. He had only taken refuge from the

rain, in the doorway, whilst he endeavoured to set it in order. He had not time, unfortunately, to look in at Barlow Lodge before the evening.

'And then, alas, my child, I cannot see you alone!' he exclaimed regretfully, 'and I must bury in my heart the thoughts that are agitating me!'

He had, then, thoughts of an agitating nature? Lucy begged that her old friend would explain himself? 'I am a traitor in the camp!' he began impulsively. 'I am committing, probably, an indiscretion, and disturbing projects which have taken years to mature! But you know, Miss Lucy, I am nothing but a foolish old man,—call me, if you like, an infatuated old simpleton,—this fact still remains: I must place you, and what is for your happiness, before the displeasure of your good aunt, and the discomfiture of Podmore! Yes, my child!' (he went on more excitedly, as he gesticulated with the dilapidated umbrella). 'It is to this being that your aunt would sacrifice your inexperience, your beauty, your tender adolescence! Your aunt means well, her intentions are admirable, but she is ignorant of the dominating passions of existence, she has the ignorance of the old maid, and it is to this ignor-

ance that you, my child, are to be sacrificed ! ' For one moment Lucy was struck dumb with amazement. Then, it was as though the passionate blood of the mediaeval Barlows had rushed tumultuously to her cheeks.

' *Mr. Podmore!* ' she exclaimed, aghast, ' marry Mr. Podmore ? My aunt must have gone raving mad ! ' and she leant for support against the lintel of the door. How every romantic dream seemed to vanish, every air-castle to crumble, at such a prosaic notion ! Mr. Podmore and Palmyra House ! Could she have been created merely for this end ?

The Marquis ceased battling with his umbrella, for he was well sheltered now, and took her hand affectionately. ' Calm yourself, my child,' he said soothingly. ' Above all, believe with me that the intentions of your good aunt are irreproachable ! But, she has been unduly influenced. Podmore has represented himself as the possessor of a large fortune, she is under obligations to him, I even think, sometimes, that she is in his debt ; she is dazzled by what she considers his magnificence, the comforts of his surroundings, and she is afraid when she dies that you may not be so comfortably situated unless you are married and have a home.

But for not liking to lose this one chance, she would rather have waited, and seen you united to some member of the aristocracy, she has as much as confessed it to me. Podmore's moral character shall remain sacred, I will not asperse it ; on one point, however, I can speak without reserve ; he is not rich : his resources are uncertain. "He is possessed of at least eight thousand pounds a-year," said your good aunt the other evening as she stood bidding me adieu. I was paralysed at the extravagance of her assertion. "Eight thousand a-year," indeed ! I will not say that he may not have had, during his career, accidental successes, he may have run blockades, invested money at high interest, played for awhile with funds that were only temporarily at his disposal. For one year, perhaps, it is just possible that his income may have arrived at this figure, but, believe me, it is not permanent ! "He will make the most generous marriage settlements," of this too, I am assured by your aunt. "Generous marriage settlements !" Now, by this alone are not my suspicions aroused ? According to the laws of your excellent country, a creditor cannot seize upon the private possessions of the wife. He would settle, therefore, upon you, my dear Miss Lucy, as much as was possible for the

protection of himself; and when the day of a catastrophe occurs, you will have to support this pretended Crœsus upon what was set aside for your own fortune.'

'I will never support him!' cried Lucy, looking determined. '*He* shall never support *me*! The whole thing is nonsense! But why,' she added suddenly, 'should he want to marry *me*? If he is ambitious, there are plenty of other girls better able to please his vanity. What can his object be? He must have some hidden motive.'

'In a few years, my dear Miss Lucy, that is a question you will have gained too much experience to ask,' returned the Marquis; 'for you will have become aware of your beauty, of your peculiar and irresistible charm. Podmore, I am willing to believe, is, after his own manner, in love. But he is middle-class,—above all,—he is *English*. He believes in the suppression, before marriage, of the emotions. Afterwards, it is possible that we may see him transfigured. His ambition has been to mould some beautiful young lady after the model he approves the most. He dreams of the domestic hearth of which he will be the absolute master,—of the wife,—who is to be for him alone. It is a dream in which we have

all of us indulged,' sighed the old Professor; 'but, alas ! to which of us has come the realization ?'

'Oh, it's all dreadful!' cried Lucy passionately ; 'how can I ever even *look* at him again ?'

'Calm yourself, my dear child,' repeated the Professor. 'This unnatural union shall never take place whilst Achille de la Vieilleroche is here to prevent it ! I am, as I have said before, nothing but an infatuated old simpleton,—an old imbecile, utterly incapable of reform ; my life has been both stormy and disappointing ; I am despoiled of fortune, and cannot be said even to possess a permanent home. I have already been married to two wives,—one French wife,—one English one ; whilst the souvenirs connected with the affections that arise in my mind, are at times absolutely overpowering ; yet so great, my child, is my devotion to you, that rather than I would allow this sacrifice to take place, *Sapristi !* I would marry you myself !'

Lucy returned no answer to this outburst of chivalrous loyalty.

'Good-bye,' she said abstractedly, and they shook hands. She walked up the pathway to the house, swinging her straw hat, as the Marquis fancied, in rather an ominous manner, and vanished through the front door.

Had Miss Elizabeth Barlow been merely an ordinary aunt,—own sister to either father or mother, or had Lucy herself been all other than she was,—she might, perhaps, have given vent to her feelings in some sort of extravagant fashion. She might have tried at first tears and protestations; and then, if these had failed to move, she might have threatened all sorts of terrible things,—to advertise for the situation of companion, to study for the dramatic profession, to go out and nurse the wounded in some war (for we seem always now-a-days to have a war going on somewhere), or to write to her relation, Lady Mabella Binks. The impetuosity of her feelings, however, was a good deal tempered and subdued by consideration for her aunt's declining years, and by the tranquil and unemotional character of her surroundings. It seemed to her that it would be a cowardly act upon her part to break in,—in all her young strength,—upon this defenceless old lady, with any show of early Barlow violence, under the very noses of the neatly executed portraits in wax and black paper, and with the great blue pickle-jars and ginger-pots towering above her in their Oriental calm.

Then, again, as the Marquis had insinuated, there were certain subjects about which Miss

Elizabeth Barlow must be of necessity profoundly ignorant. ‘She has the ignorance of the old maid,’ he had declared. It would be impossible to make her understand.

No ; Lucy would go upstairs to her bed-room and reflect. She would endeavour to make out some plan of immediate action, but she would do nothing impetuous.

As she passed the half-open sitting-room door, she caught sight of her great-aunt, seated, pen in hand, at her writing-table. A prim, shrunken figure, in a plain black silk dress, made after no particular fashion, and with grey curls, arranged at the ears with side-combs. What, as the old Frenchman had said, could such a person know of ‘the dominating passions of existence?’ Of the lovings and hatings, of the irresistible physical attractions and repulsions ?

For about a *repulsion*, at any rate, Lucy had already come to know that there was something physical,—something apart from all moral considerations and traditions. Mr. Podmore might be (and possibly *was*) one of the noblest and most disinterested of mankind. She knew him (or *fancied* that she knew him) to be in the highest degree respectable. ‘Podmore’s moral character,’

the Marquis had said, ‘shall remain sacred.’ She fully shared in his sentiments with regard to ‘the domestic hearth,’—about the wife who was to be ‘for him alone;’ such ideas, however much a Frenchman might sneer at them, were surely virtuous and honourable; and yet,—and yet she could never so much as touch Mr. Podmore’s hand without experiencing that strange sensation of shuddering disgust which had possessed her when she had picked up the large pink sea-anemone in her new ‘Aquarium.’ She was quite willing to lay the blame entirely at her own door; it might have something to do with the hereditary Barlow loathing for sago and tapioca, which were also soft, glutinous, oleaginous substances; perhaps it was something mesmeric, and altogether unaccountable; but surely it must be a very strong reason against *marrying* the person who inspired it.

‘Ten thousand pounds at seven-and-a-half per cent. How much would that be, Lucy, my dear? You are the latest from school.’

The voice of Miss Elizabeth Barlow recalled her great-niece’s wandering spirit. The handsome countenance of the old lady was turned now towards the doorway, as, stroking her chin gently

with the feather of her quill-pen, she seemed to reflect. Lucy could perceive in her face nothing but what was expressive of nobility, serenity, and high-mindedness.

'Why, really, Aunty, I can't tell you till I've made it out upon paper,' she constrained herself to answer as quietly as possible. 'What very high interest! I'll just go up to my room and make out the calculation.'

As she went slowly up the narrow staircase, her eye lighted, as it invariably *did* light, upon the heraldic window-blind.

The day being dark and stormy for the summer season, the greater portion of the blind was gathered up upon the roller, but there, close to the knot of the crimson blind string, was her own particular cognizance, descending from the centre of the hyphen which united Captain William Barlow of the Royal Navy to Miss Lucinda Binks. And there, oh, there, united by just such another hyphen to her own particular lozenge, was the phantom shield, empty, as yet, of emblem, initial, or heraldic blazon,—the shadowy indication of some sort of eventual future—vague, shrouded, inscrutable. For, surely, surely,—it had not, just now, been revealed to her?

Surely, surely, all these kings, barons, knights, squires, and captains in the Royal Navy, could not have hyphened themselves to their respective ladies merely for this ignoble end ;—that the last scutcheon upon the great Barlow window-blind should bear only the letters ‘*S.A.P.*’—those detested initials! There was something positively maddening in the idea that any such ridiculous union could ever have been contemplated by anyone having her happiness at heart, Lucy said to herself as she entered her own little room and closed the door.

‘Bless me!’ exclaimed Miss Elizabeth, starting at the sound of the reverberation ; ‘the dear girl is a thorough Barlow from head to foot! But if she goes on banging the doors like that, she will certainly shake down some of the old family china !’ and she looked up at the blue pickle-jars and ginger-pots, to make sure that they had withstood the shock unscathed. And, indeed, Lucy herself was just realising with regret that, owing to the irritation of her nervous system, she might perhaps have closed her bedroom door rather too much after the old ancestral fashion.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MENTION has been made so often in these pages of Lady Mabella Binks, that it may be as well, perhaps, to state what was the nature of her relationship to the ladies of my story, before I proceed with it any further.

By turning to the earlier portion of this work it will be seen that Lucy's mother is described as having been the 'only daughter of the Reverend Orlando Binks,' but this gentleman had also an only son, who was christened 'Orlando,' after his father, and, like him, took Holy Orders.

Now, I take it that the Binkses,—from all that I am able to gather concerning them,—were a much less combative and impetuous family than the Barlows,—at any rate, in the days of their beginning,—possessing fewer distinguishing traits, being less self-opinionated, and having their individuality much less sharply defined and ac-

centuated. They closed their doors in a quiet, considerate manner, both upon entering and leaving an apartment, took anchovy sauce with their fish, cayenne pepper with their wild-duck, had no exaggerated loathing for either sago or tapioca, and avoided poking the fire violently with the best poker. You might very easily have persuaded a Binks, as it were, to drink, when no power could have dragged a Barlow to the water. In a word, they seem to have been much more conventional and adaptive in all their ways, and to have possessed an infinitely keener eye to the main chance.

By reason of these inherited qualities, the Reverend Orlando Binks (Lucy's maternal uncle) had no sooner obtained the appointment of Domestic Chaplain to the late Earl of Belmorris, than he set to work to win the affections of the oldest and plainest of his lordship's two daughters, the Lady Mabella, of whom mention has been already made. In this he very soon succeeded, and the marriage ensued in due time, after which event, however, his health had gradually declined, and, notwithstanding the excellent clerical appointments which had been bestowed upon him in England, he had been compelled for the last few

years of his life to winter abroad, and there it was that he had eventually ended his days, when he had barely arrived at middle age. He had been an exceedingly handsome man, after rather an effeminate style of beauty, with an oily and insinuating address, which, no doubt, had he lived, might have assisted him to a place upon the Bench of Bishops. By his union with the Lady Mabella he had two children,—Miss Adeliza, or ‘Addie’ Binks, and Master Algernon Orlando, familiarly known as ‘Algy;’ the first being some three or four years older than her cousin Lucy, and the latter of almost exactly Lucy’s own age.

Upon the day on which Lucy had been taken up to London for the extraction of her two first-permanent-bicusped-molars, Miss Elizabeth Barlow had paid a formal visit to her noble connexion (for, of course, between Lady Mabella and herself there existed no actual blood-relationship, notwithstanding that the late Mr. Binks had been Lucy’s own maternal uncle). It had long been Miss Elizabeth’s wish, in consequence of this near kinship, to introduce her great-niece to this other aunt by marriage, feeling that she herself was by this time well stricken in years, and that the

more friends Lucy could make, the better it would be for her in the future. She had written therefore to Lady Mabella, with whom, from time to time, she had been in the habit of corresponding, apprising her of her intended visit to London, and hoping that she might be permitted to pay a short visit to Wilton Place, where the Binks family were at this period located. In reply, she had received a very friendly invitation to luncheon at two o'clock; and Lady Mabella had expressed her pleasure at the idea that Lucy, of whom she had always heard such a charming account, should make the acquaintance of Algernon and Adeliza, who happened then to be both of them at home. The appointment with the dentist, however, which was the prime reason of the visit to town, had ended by somewhat interfering with Miss Elizabeth's benevolent plans.

A quarter of an hour after the extraction of one's two first-permanent-bicusped-molars is hardly the moment one would select for making a favourable impression at luncheon, and poor Lucy had consequently remained inside the hired Clapham fly, the driver of which was told to draw up under the shadow of St. Paul's Church,

upon the opposite side of the way, during her great-aunt's visit to this other younger aunt.

The whole thing was, of course, a terrible disappointment to Miss Elizabeth, and it was so long since she had had any teeth of her own to extract, that she had not anticipated the *contretemps*. She was extremely gratified, however, at the kind manner in which she had been received at luncheon.

Lady Mabella was, as usual, all sweetness and humility (for she belonged rather to the 'bruised-reed' order of women), and Miss Elizabeth was also much pleased with the beauty and vivacity of Adeliza. Master Algernon Binks had pleased her as well, although in a totally different way. His manners, she thought, were perhaps a little noisy and self-asserting, but then boys were so *very* differently brought up now to what they were in the far-off days of her own youth. He possessed a most amiable disposition, however; of this she felt quite sure, for he had escorted her most attentively to the front door, where, after she had searched for some time in the depths of her 'reticule' or hand-bag, in order to make sure that she had not mislaid her list of shopping, she had bidden him farewell.

It had flashed upon Miss Elizabeth, from a peculiar expression which came into his face as she grasped his hand, that she remembered to have heard that Eton boys sometimes expected a small gratuity from their relations during the vacation. But, then, in this case there was no actual ‘tie of blood,’ besides which, it would have been difficult, just as she was in the flurry of departure, to make out what would have been a right and proper amount. Five, or even *ten*, shillings, might have been too little, perhaps, considering Master Binks’s exalted social standing, whilst a sovereign seemed to her to be too much, unless she had wished to have conveyed to him quite a disquieting sense of ‘bribery and corruption.’

Fifteen shillings, which might have met the requirements of the case, was such an awkward sum to have to get out of one’s purse without spectacles, and with the Binks boy-in-buttons staring at one all the time, to say nothing of the young gentleman himself.

Miss Elizabeth, in a word, had rejoined Lucy and her toothache without having parted with anything in the way of cash, but the reader must not for this reason set her down as having been guilty of meanness.

Neither her late brother, John Barlow, Esquire, nor Captain William Barlow, her nephew, had ever been at Eton. They had both received their education at Charterhouse, and there are some questions that even a pallid ‘Peerage’ is powerless to answer.

Ever since the time of this visit, Lady Mabella had had her head-quarters in Wilton Place, but she visited a good deal amongst the country houses of her fashionable friends and relations during the shooting season, whilst after remaining in London from the first week in January until Easter, she had usually exchanged domiciles, of late years, with the widow of an Admiral, to whom apartments had been allotted in Hampton Court Palace, so that Miss Addie’s existence must have presented a marked contrast to Lucy’s in the way of variety.

The Binkses, however, notwithstanding their assured position in society, were anything but well-off; and Adeliza, in spite of her good looks, her vivacious manners, and the numerous opportunities she must have had of selecting and overcoming her appointed male, was still unmarried. Young Algernon Binks was confidently studying for the Army, having already failed

in the two first preliminary examinations ; and although his mother may have believed that the *baton* of a Field-Marshall was lurking in some corner of his portmanteau, those who had had the best opportunities of judging, were inclined to think that he would not probably be much more successful at his next trial.

Altogether, Miss Elizabeth Barlow was wont, at times, to congratulate herself upon her own peaceful existence when she thought of that of her more fashionable connexions, thanking Heaven, somewhat pharisaically, that she was not as the Binkses were ; that her income, although modest, was sufficient for her modest wants. That she had no efforts to make ;—no state to keep up ;—that Lucy, who had never been into the great world of fashion,—seemed so tractable and so contented, and required so very few new dresses ; and that they might be waited upon by Sarah the parlour-maid, instead of by some mutton-fisted man-of-all-work, who, besides smashing up all the old family china, would probably be so very much more difficult for an infirm old single lady to regulate and keep in order.

Now, all these particulars with regard to the Binkses would be utterly and entirely superfluous,

and I should be behaving, by thus dwelling upon them, like the fox-hound when he rushes off hunting hares, were it not that, upon this particular day, as the ‘pointed arrows of the rain’ were being absorbed into the thirsty earth of the little garden at Barlow Lodge, Lady Mabella, as well as Miss Elizabeth, was seated at her writing-table, pen in hand, and that from this one simple circumstance, nearly three whole volumes of complications and misunderstandings were pre-destined to ensue.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE letter which Lady Mabella Binks was composing at her writing-table in Hampton Court Palace, within full view of the river, the bridge, and the cavalry barracks,—for the drawing-room windows of the apartment which had been allotted to the Admiral's widow happened to look out this way,—was addressed to ‘Miss Elizabeth Barlow, Barlow Lodge, Clapham Common,’ and was couched in the following terms:—

‘ MY DEAR MISS BARLOW,—

‘ It is a long, long, time—a perfect age—in fact, since I last had the pleasure of receiving news of you and yours! *My own* excuse for not having written, I feel, however, that you will understand and forgive,—since *you*, too, have the responsibility of a young charge. My two young people,—I can no longer call them my “*children*”

—for alas ! Time flies apace !—encroach more and more every day upon my leisure hours :—my duty to Adeliza obliging me to stay up later at night than was my usual wont,—entails to one in my wretched state of health, several hours in a recumbent position during the afternoon,—thus rendering letter-writing almost, if not entirely, out of the question ; whilst the necessary correspondence connected with Algernon's future profession (the Army), occupies nearly all the time that I formerly devoted to my old friends. It would be ungrateful of me, however,—blessed as I am in my widowhood, with these two bright and delightful companions,—were I to complain of their interference with my own selfish pleasures,—for you will know, dear Miss Barlow, that to correspond with you, and to enjoy the privilege of your friendship, must ever be, to me, one of the keenest of pleasures. But, in thinking, thus, of the requirements of my own children, I feel that I must not forget your dear,—*our* dear, Lucy—my poor lost Orlando's own niece—his favourite sister Lucinda's only child ! I know, by the difference in age between her and my own Adeliza, that she must now be quite grown-up, and I feel perfectly sure that—under your wise

and tender guidance—she has fulfilled her early promise, and realized all your affectionate anticipations. But let me no longer conceal from you my second object in writing;—for I must admit that my *first* was to assure myself of your own health and well-being. Cannot dear Lucy come and stay with us, here, next week,—when we shall be a little gayer than usual on account of Hampton Races? *Ladies* do not ever attend them,—it is not considered desirable,—so that Lucy will require nothing at all elaborate in the way of *dress*,—but my brother Belmorris,—who is, as you may have heard, a most ardent patron of *The Turf*, (he is the owner, amongst other race-horses, of “Miss Marchmont,” the celebrated mare, who, but for a lamentable accident, would certainly have won “the Oaks” this year)—will be staying with us for a few days, and some of his friends will be likely to be having luncheon with us during the races,—which will ensure for dear Lucy a little lively society. I should wish her, however, to remain on with us afterwards, for at least a week, or more, if you are able to spare her. These gardens are now in great beauty--there is much in the Palace to interest and instruct, and I think I may say, without vanity, that she will

find my two young people both agreeable and intelligent companions.

'With Adeliza's and Algernon's kindest regards, believe me to be, my dear Miss Barlow, very sincerely yours,

'MABELLA BINKS.

'P.S. Should it not be convenient to you to spare a maid to accompany dear Lucy,—my children will meet her at the railway-station, here, and Guffy—my own maid—will be delighted to attend upon her during her stay.'

Now, it is not always possible, when recounting a story, to look into the hearts of the personages, and detect their secret musings. 'By their works ye shall know them,' ought, generally, to be the novelist's rule; and although I may, sometimes, have been tempted to fall in with those authors who pretend to perceive the motive, as well as the act, and who know, therefore, to a certainty, just how all their characters are going to behave; I have, the more often, found, that, no sooner have I set down the names, ages, and sexes, of my personages upon paper, than they break away, altogether, from my maternal control, and no one can be more shocked

or astonished than I am myself, at some of the strange and reprehensible vagaries that they commit, without so much as paying me the compliment of asking my leave !

This has reference, however, simply to the miserable puppets of fiction. My story, in the present instance—being true—for the most part, should be dealt with rather after the trite manner of a record, and I only feel justified, consequently, in setting down what actually took place, except where a direct sympathy with any particular character has predisposed me to some manner of thought-reading. I am merely able to guess, therefore, at the secret motives which animated the bosom of Lady Mabella Binks when she invited Lucy Barlow to stay with her at Hampton Court Palace. It is possible,—assuming her motives to have been purely selfish,—that she may have simply wished for an agreeable and pretty young lady, who would come to her without the incumbrance of either *chaperon* or hand-maid, in order that her ‘brother Belmorris’ and his sporting friends might be the better entertained during their stay for the races. Or, again, she was ignorant, perhaps, altogether, of what the old Professor had termed Lucy’s ‘peculiar and

irresistible charm,' and may have fancied that a shy, awkward, red-handed, young person—in plain Quakerish garments—would act as a satisfactory 'foil' to her own handsome and fashionably-dressed daughter, and would show off her sparkle and vivacity to a still greater advantage. Lastly—although this is what, to a cynical mind, may appear to be the most unlikely—she may really have desired to act kindly towards her dead husband's orphan niece, his 'favourite sister Lucinda's only child ;' whilst the politeness and cordiality of her letter to Miss Elizabeth—who could scarcely have been expected to do anything for the advancement of her interests—may have proceeded, solely, from the fact that Lady Mabella was, perhaps, one of those considerate people who make it their pleasure to be polite and cordial to everybody 'all round.' What a pity it is that there are not more of such people in the world !

Miss Elizabeth Barlow, at any rate, was much pleased and flattered by this letter. She felt, however, a little nervous about the actual preparations for the visit. At her advanced age, all changes—or the having to do with the arrangement and organization of changes—was a mental distress to her. She was one of those persons

who had never thoroughly and conscientiously comprehended her ‘Bradshaw,’—about which Sarah, likewise, was ignorant ‘as the babe unborn,’—and she did not wish to consult Lucy, who possessed some sort of rudimentary knowledge upon the subject, until she had ascertained whether the difficulties she foresaw were, or were *not*, absolutely insurmountable, for, upon the first blush of the idea, it almost seemed to her as if she had the planning of a journey to China.

This was just the kind of emergency where Sydney Podmore was wont to throw himself into the breach, and be leant upon, proving—by reason of his exact information—the superior quality of his ‘sap;’ for Monsieur de la Vieilleroche was rather too much a man of abstract theories to be generally useful. As things stood, however, Miss Elizabeth felt almost afraid of consulting Mr. Podmore, and, if Lucy could have started off, then and there,—in a balloon, or upon a bicycle,—for Hampton Court Palace, she would have felt intensely relieved.

It was a little provoking that this invitation had not arrived whilst Mr. Podmore was in the Isle of Wight,—for, how could she tell that he might not object altogether to this visit, and—

once he had objected—how could she be sure that she might not desire it much more anxiously herself, and discover, perhaps, that it would be the making of Lucy's future? . . And yet, how could it have any influence upon her future if she was already promised to Mr. Podmore? . . That she should have been so promised—or rather *half*-promised—before she had had any real experience of ‘men and manners,’ did certainly seem—now that this amiable invitation had been received—to be rather a pity,—for, during her sojourn at Hampton Court Palace, who could say what other possibilities might not arise? . . In such circumstances, however, would not Mr. Podmore, as a man of honour, let her off the engagement at once, particularly when he was reminded that Lucy herself had never been a party to it at all? . . But then again,—in the midst of the old lady's perplexity, there flashed upon her memory—so retentive always of heraldic devices—the motto of ‘the Podmores of Middlesex’ in all its dogged significance, ‘*Let Podmore hold what Podmore held.*’ It had been kept a good deal out of sight, certainly, rarely appearing upon any object at Palmyra House; but it might have gathered fresh force by reason of its suppression, and she had

observed, at times, a peculiar tightening about the Podmorian upper-lip, which seemed to betoken firm determination of purpose. . . . ‘I have never adopted a moustache,’ Mr. Podmore had once explained, ‘for I consider that it conceals the expression of the mouth, and I am not ashamed that the world should see that plain Sydney Podmore has, at least, an honest smile!’ and it was this fact which had enabled Miss Elizabeth Barlow to perceive the tightening. No; it was extremely unlikely, she felt, that Mr. Podmore would abandon his claims without a determined struggle, and then, again, she was under so many serious obligations to him! . . . ‘Ah! *I thought so!*’ she sighed, by-and-by, somewhat regretfully. She had taken down the faded ‘Peerage’ from its shelf, and turned to ‘*Belmorris (Earl of:—) Algernon Augustus, 5th Earl, b. 3rd Novr. 1834.*’ . . .

‘Only forty-three next November, and a bachelor! . . . . Nearly ten years younger than his eldest sister! . . . . Dear me! . . . . *Supposing?* . . . .’

But, of course, it would be abject folly and presumption to ‘suppose!’ . . . . Only, sometimes, particularly when people were promised and affianced to other people, such *very extra-*

*ordinary* things were wont to happen! . . . . This particular possibility, however, was, certainly, very remote! Lucy would only be for such a very short time in the society of the sporting nobleman; for would he not, probably, be at the races all day? And, alas! ladies did not go to Hampton Races, and it was not 'considered desirable'! . . . . He would have to be a *very* susceptible and impulsive person, indeed, to fall in love so soon; and, had he possessed this sort of disposition, it was hardly likely that he would have remained unmarried until he was forty-three! . . . . It was much more likely, on the contrary, that he was a determined woman-hater! . . . . Even if he was *not*, however, and even supposing—only *supposing!*—that he did actually fall desperately in love with Lucy, would not such a union be highly distasteful to Lady Mabella; for, of course, young Algernon Binks must have certain expectations from the fact of his uncle's celibacy? . . . . But then, after all, it was quite impossible to consider *everybody's* feelings! . . . . There would be a very grand wedding, of course. . . . Perhaps she could manage to re-arrange that plum-coloured '*moiré-antique*' which she had never worn, as it was

thought unlucky to go to a wedding in black. . . . Trimmed up with her ermine 'set' (for the marriage could hardly take place before the winter), which had been laid by for more than twenty years, in a tin box, with six of Captain William Barlow's best Havannah cigars, to keep off the moth ; it would produce quite a regal effect, and show the fashionable world assembled in church, that, even in these 'latter days,' the Barlows were able to hold their own ! . . . . Lucy would, of course, act with fairness and generosity to young Algernon Binks, and use her influence with the Earl in order that he might make him some sort of allowance by way of compensation ; Lord Belmorris might ally himself with many young ladies who would be far less kind and considerate to young Algernon Binks than Lucy ! . . . .

The prosaic accents of Sarah recalled the old lady's wandering fancy.

'If you please, mum, don't you think, if Miss Lucy goes visiting, I'd better ask the laundress to call for her new pink cotton, so as it may be properly got up by Saturday ? They does the washing early in the week.'

True, too true ! There was the momentous

question of dress! . . . . Was it reasonable to expect that any one could possibly subjugate a ‘belted Earl’ in a plain pink cotton, even if it was ‘properly got up’? . . . . Fortunately, however, Lucy possessed other dresses.

Feeling almost as though she were about to commit some sort of nefarious act, Miss Elizabeth Barlow, accompanied by Sarah, whom she had taken into her confidence, made her way upstairs to Lucy’s bedroom, and commenced a systematic overhauling of her wardrobe.

She lighted, in the first place, upon a very hopeless and pathetic-looking garment indeed: Lucy’s Confirmation-frock, made out of white alpaca; too short in the skirt, too narrow across the chest, too loose in the waist; the dress of an unformed girl. *New* white alpaca, let in to supply deficiencies, would present a blue and shiny appearance, and would be instantly detected. It might be thus renovated, perhaps, in the winter months, when the afternoons were short, and when there was no risk of beginning dinner by daylight. Before then, however, who could say what important changes might not have taken place? . . . . Miss Elizabeth came, next, upon the wispy white muslin which Lucy wore

habitually, in the evening. She looked very pretty in it, of course, because she had a way of looking pretty in almost anything, and, with her coral necklace, and a white rose in her hair, it did very well, no doubt, for the friendly little whist-parties at Barlow Lodge; but it had been mended and let out in several places, and was quite, quite unfit for the visit to Hampton Court.

*Two* dresses out of Lucy's by no means extensive stock, utterly useless and *hors de combat!* . . . . Miss Elizabeth's hopes revived, however, when, by-and-by, she chanced upon a dress which, till then, she had entirely forgotten. A Chinese washing-silk, brought home in the piece, ever so many years ago, by Captain William Barlow, when such stuffs were very much more uncommon than they are now, of the colour of brown holland, but softer, and more reliable, worked all over with little white silk stars like spiders. This was a dress to which no sort of exception could be taken. It might be worn without a blush, in any society in Europe, and it possessed, also, a certain spice of originality. It was a dress upon which one might pin one's faith! . . . .

Looking, at this moment, out of the window, for she had advanced towards the light the better

to examine the washing-silk, Miss Elizabeth perceived her great-niece seated under the medlar-tree at her work. She was cutting up an old table-cloth into dusters and fish-napkins, and, in order to protect her neat black cashmere dress from the frayings and ravellings of the linen, she had tied on one of her lawn-tennis aprons,—the one that was embroidered all over with yellow marigolds. The sight of this lawn-tennis apron was quite an inspiration to Miss Elizabeth, for Lucy possessed five other aprons, similar as to shape, to this one, but worked over with different flowers and designs ; and these six aprons, worn, at judicious intervals, over Lucy's three day-dresses (the pink cotton, the Chinese silk, and the black merino), would produce upon the beholder quite an agreeable impression of variety, and prevent the monotony of her costume from palling upon Lord Belmorris and the Binkses. Still, Lucy would certainly require one new evening dress, and this must be put in hand at once, if the visit to Hampton Court was actually to take place. Sarah's eldest sister, formerly lady's maid in a family of wealth and respectability, had 'set up' as a dressmaker in the immediate vicinity ; and Sarah knew for certain,

that, to oblige Miss Elizabeth Barlow, she would cheerfully work her fingers to the bone. The ‘body’ of Miss Lucy’s black merino, which fitted her so well, could be sent off surreptitiously that very evening, when Miss Lucy ‘changed’ for dinner, and the pattern could be cut out all ready to try on, before Miss Lucy knew anything about it at all. . . .

‘Stay, Sarah, not quite so fast !’ exclaimed Miss Elizabeth, in almost a tragical voice. ‘It is useless to make plans before we have consulted either Miss Lucy or Mr. Podmore ! Mr. Podmore may not consider that the visit is desirable ; and, now that I come to think of it, I feel almost certain that when the plan is proposed to Miss Lucy herself, she will prefer to remain at home !’

## CHAPTER X.

WHO would have suspected from these last words that, in less than a week from this very time, Lucy would be actually in the inside of a four-wheeled cab,—upon the top of which were her trunk and band-box,—accompanied by Sarah, the parlour-maid, who had been deputed to see her off at Clapham Junction, bound for Hampton Court?

It had all come about in this wise.

We left Lucy, in the last chapter, seated under her favourite medlar-tree, in the spot she had christened ‘the jungle,’ engaged in useful needlework. By four o’clock she had hemmed a ‘crumb-cloth,’ a ‘thumb-cloth’ (both of them quite small objects), a fish-napkin, and an ordinary duster; but she had hemmed them automatically, without consciousness of their several uses. She was thinking of her repulsion for Mr. Podmore,

which had been steadily increasing ever since the old Marquis's disclosures.

'How shall I ever meet him again?' she was thinking. 'Oh, to fly to the uttermost corner of the earth out of his reach!'

She would have gone, in fact, at this moment, a good deal further from home than to Hampton Court Palace!

For the first time in her life she felt anxious and unsettled. She had no wish to thwart her aunt, or to overthrow her projects, but this was a sacrifice which, unless it was absolutely necessary, in order to avert some terrible catastrophe, she felt that it would be quite impossible for her to make. Why might she not be permitted to live on, unmolested, just as she was?

She sat musing thus until the grey pear-tree wall of the opposite garden,—for she was looking towards the confines of 'The Aspens,'—had become wrapped in shadow, and the evening sky grew rosy with the sunset.

Unlike a woman,—a red-brick wall which, at its beginning, is one of the ugliest objects created by man,—becomes handsomer as it grows old. All kinds of beautiful gold and silver lichens creep over it as the years go by, in stars and spangles,

and weird devices; there is a velvet moss, too, growing in tufts and bosses, and greener than any other, which clings to the ridges and angles of the brickwork, whilst from its cracks and crevices delicate bines and cresses, which seem only to flourish in this barren soil, uplift tiny heads of pink, yellow, and lavender, which tremble upon their fragile stems with the faintest of summer breezes.

The wall dividing Barlow Lodge from the garden of 'The Aspens' was just such a wall as this,—tempered and matured by age,—and Lucy, without knowing exactly why, derived always a fresh pleasure in looking at it. To-day, perhaps, the contemplation of anything so calm and impassive might even have served to soothe the troubled current of her thoughts, but as she raised her eyes to this defining boundary, the mysterious syren of 'The Aspens' commenced with her soul-piercing '*roulades*' and '*crescendos*;' and although Lucy delighted in music of another kind, she felt too disagreeably impressed by these present sounds to reflect peacefully upon anything. So she folded up her household needlework, and wandered down to the lower end of the garden, in order to get as far away as possible from the singing.

Here, she fell in again with her little neighbour. Perhaps she disturbed her Mama with her prattle, and may have been sent out of the way whilst she was practising.

'Miss Barlow! Miss Barley! Miss Lucy!' the child began calling out, having been apparently informed, perhaps by the Marquis, of her pretty neighbour's name.

'Your Mama is singing, isn't she?' asked Lucy, after they had greeted one another through the wooden paling.

'Yes; Mama nearly always sings,' answered the little girl, as though rather wearily. 'She scolds me a good deal because I can't learn to play properly. My Mama sings the loudest of anybody in Church.'

So she went to Church, then, this woman who, for some mysterious reason, seemed to be so unfavourably looked upon! No doubt she only went there to sing loud, and to show off her fine dresses and bonnets, for such a person could hardly have any real sense of true religion; or was she not, perhaps, quite so black as she was painted? . . . Lucy had never observed her at the Church she frequented herself; perhaps she went to some other one,—to London it may be,—

where there would be more people to see and hear her?

'Mama sings the same songs over and over again,' the child went on, 'because she wants to get them quite right. She'll go on singing them a great deal more now, because my god-papa is coming here next Saturday. He's going to stay here all day and all night. My god-papa has been away for a long time.'

Ah, a 'god-papa!'—a brother of Mr. Van-Something's, or some sort of relation, probably, but yet not necessarily, who had been away 'for a long time.' Would he find out what a disagreeable reputation his hostess had managed to acquire in the meanwhile?

After talking for some time longer with this child of a mysterious mother, Lucy leant down over the wooden fence and kissed her upturned face, because she had such sad and such wonderful eyes, and because she felt drawn towards her by she knew not what subtle attraction.

Then she retraced her footsteps to the house, and here Miss Elizabeth formally apprised her of her aunt's invitation, and inquired of her what answer she would desire her to send to Lady Mabella by the evening post.

The old lady was not a little surprised at Lucy's reply. The idea of this invitation seemed to afford her unqualified satisfaction. Was she, then, not quite so happy and contented as may have been supposed? . . . Was she hankering after fresh scenes and more exciting enjoyments? . . . Did not her great-aunt's society, with that of her two accustomed guests, combined with the occasional hemming of dusters, suffice for her after all? . . .

Miss Elizabeth felt, certainly, a good deal perplexed, but the fact remained that Mr. Podmore was, now, the only person to be consulted. Just as she was about to sit down and indite a note to him, however,—brimfull of complicated feminine explanations, subterfuges, and sophistries, calculated to smooth down his presumably ruffled feelings,—the melancholy Hitchens,—Mr. Podmore's faithful 'body-servant,' presented himself at the garden-door. He was the bearer of a letter from his master which seemed greatly to simplify Miss Elizabeth's course of action;—Mr. Podmore had been suddenly obliged to start for Liverpool upon important business, where it was probable that he would have to remain for at least a fortnight. He would be absent, in fact,

during the greater part of Lucy's stay at Hampton Court Palace, and once she had actually arrived there, it would be much less difficult to convince him of all the advantages which were likely to accrue from the visit. Miss Elizabeth was now, therefore, as eager as Lucy had been to avail herself of Lady Mabella's kind invitation. But, upon hearing the contents of Mr. Podmore's letter, Lucy suddenly veered round like a weathercock. Why should she leave her peaceful home now that the being who seemed lately to have rendered it unbearable had taken it into his head to depart? . . . So, she would much prefer,—upon second thoughts, to remain quietly with her great-aunt, and not to go upon this visit at all.

But it was now the moment for Miss Elizabeth to exert her authority.

'No, no, my dear child!' she protested. 'I perceive your good-natured motive,—you fancy that I shall be lonely during your absence, but I shall be happy in thinking that you are amused, and I dare say you will often write to me. I should be very wrong to allow you to make this sacrifice, for it would be unwise, as well as ungracious, to throw away this chance of becoming acquainted with your poor mother's relations. I

shall write and accept Lady Mabella's kind invitation at once !'

And so it came to pass that quite early in the afternoon of the following Monday, Lucy found herself in a four-wheeled cab on her way to the Railway Station. The cab, notwithstanding the lightness of Lucy's luggage,—for her box was by no means heavily weighted,—progressed but slowly,—and I fear that *I* too, have got on no faster with my narrative. But 'matter grows under our hands,' says Sterne. 'Let no man say —“Come,—I'll write a duodecimo.”'

## CHAPTER XI.

UPON arriving at Clapham Junction, all was bustle and confusion, and two young persons of Luey's and Sarah's inexperience might well have been excused if they had felt a little bewildered by it. Sarah, however, was endowed with a considerable amount of shrewdness, besides which, she had walked to the station upon the previous day, and had obtained all the particulars relating to the journey from a sympathetic porter, to whom she had afterwards presented a sixpenny piece, acting upon Miss Elizabeth's instructions. This modest sum had rendered her mistress of the situation, and the 'particulars,'—noted down upon paper,—were now in her hand.

Now, Miss Elizabeth Barlow had earnestly impressed upon Sarah that it would be in the highest degree desirable to establish her young mistress in a compartment in which there were already ladies; but, as the persons answering to

this description seemed to be penned up together with but scanty breathing space, besides, being, for the most part, of a somewhat sinister and forbidding aspect, glaring most unpleasantly at poor Lucy whenever she approached their carriage-door, and as they were accompanied, in other instances, by babies, and older children, sucking pears and greengages; our young traveller (being as yet but a novice), and untroubled, consequently, by apprehensions relative to the murderers, robbers, and other bold, bad men, who might possibly invade her carriage at intermediate stations, to say nothing of lunatics, who seem also to be most generous patrons of the railroad; petitioned Sarah to be allowed to make the journey by herself, with which request the unsophisticated Sarah at once complied, not having received any instructions to the contrary.

But for all this, it was not pre-destined that Lucy should travel alone.

Just as the train was moving away from the platform, a tall man, dressed in the light garments which are generally worn by Englishmen who are bound for the country, dashed into the compartment, and established himself in the further corner of it, facing where Lucy was sitting.

Serpent-like, the train glided out of the covered railway-station, and Lucy found herself alone with the stranger.

His selection of this particular railway-carriage, which might at first have appeared like a compliment to its sole occupant, had evidently been purely accidental, seeing that Lucy was seated in the corner which was furthest from the platform, and that he could not, therefore, have been even aware of her presence. She fancied that he gave a quick look of surprise when he perceived her. Perhaps he had wanted to smoke, or, at any rate, to be in a carriage by himself? Perhaps he had merely wished to avoid the cross-looking old ladies with the pear-sucking children? She hoped that he was not really annoyed at finding her there; but she fancied,—just for the first half-minute,—that he seemed to look so. Soon, however, he settled himself behind his newspaper.

At any rate, she was not old, she did not feel cross, and she was not sucking pears or green-gages!

It seemed in the highest degree absurd to set about wondering,—so very, very soon,—what a total stranger might feel regarding her presence. Whether she *was*, or was *not*, in his way for so

short a journey, and what was his private motive for entering one particular railway-carriage, which, like the rest, was open to all the world, rather than another? But, then, this stranger was totally different (to *look at*, at least), from any other man that Lucy had ever seen.

She dared not raise her eyes to consider him minutely,—being seized with a strange sensation of timidity,—but, without doing so, she became at once conscious of his every movement to an almost painful degree.

Were he to speak to her, she felt as if she knew, by intuition, exactly what his voice would be like.

This state of nervous tension lasted some time, then it increased ten-fold, for she knew, still without seeing, that he had raised his eyes from his newspaper, and was looking at her. She felt his gaze passing over her face almost like the touch of a hand caressing it. She shifted her position, drew aside the blind which had been lowered as a protection from the sun, and looked out of the window. What would she not have given for a book!

By-and-by, however, she experienced a feeling of relief,—of escape, as it were,—from some un-

accountable thraldom. She ventured to glance towards the further corner of the carriage. The stranger had closed his eyes. He was apparently asleep.

Then, like ‘the lily maid of Astolat,’ in the presence of

‘The great knight, the darling of the Court;’  
she

‘Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments;’  
and even as Lancelot appeared to Elaine,

‘He seemed the goodliest man  
That ever amongst ladies ate in Hall,  
And noblest. . . .’

*Nobility*, indeed, in the truest sense of the word, seemed to Lucy to be the chief characteristic of his face. *Asleep* he looked (she thought), almost too like the figure of a sculptured knight upon a tombstone to seem quite human, for in repose, this air of supreme dignity lent an expression of sternness to his regular features. But his eyes, when he opened them, would turn him at once into a being of flesh and blood.

Lucy had never before seen any eyes that seemed to say so many different things at once. To smile, to plead, to regret, to hunger, and all

without a single word from the lips! They were not very dark eyes,—either blue or grey, or a mixture of both,—but their lashes and brows were dark. All the same, he was what would be called a fair man, with a fairness a good deal tanned by the sun, for his heavy moustaches were streaked with gold, and his hair, although several shades darker, was brown where the light caught it. It would have curled, if it had had its own way, Lucy perceived, only it had been cut too short. Very probably he was a soldier, but he had none of the typical soldier's rigidity.

Of course Lucy did not know much about men or their professions. She felt sure, however, that he was neither a City stockbroker nor a teacher of languages.

The loyal Hitchens, as the reader may remember, had asserted that his master ‘ought to have been a Prince.’ Mr. Podmore, notwithstanding Lucy’s unreasoning aversion, may possibly have had a prince’s *soul*;—he possessed, however, rather the *body* of a licensed victualler, and by no straining of the imagination could Lucy have invested his outward man with any princely attribute. But if strength, dignity, and manly beauty, were always the accompaniments of the

most exalted rank, this sleeping stranger of the railway-carriage ought to have been an Emperor at least! His dress, too, although easy and extremely simple, had about it some sort of mysterious stamp of distinction which made it harmonise with its wearer. Gaining confidence as she proceeded, Lucy allowed her eyes to take in every detail connected with his appearance. Hanging from his watch-chain, which was of a very quiet and unobtrusive pattern, she espied a wedding-ring (possibly his mother's), a gold key, and a threepenny piece with a hole through it. His hands were sun-burnt, but beautifully shaped, and he wore no rings. It was difficult to discover why it was that he appeared to be so very well dressed, but the fact remained that he certainly looked like a Prince, or like every Prince ought to look if he could. Perhaps, when he spoke, the illusion would be destroyed, but yet Lucy did not think this likely, having made up her mind that his voice, too, would be princely. But he would not speak now, for he was fast asleep.

Just at this moment, however,—as she was intent upon their closed lashes, he opened his eyes.

She blushed, in miserable confusion, and averted her gaze.

As Mr. Podmore had said,—a moustache certainly concealed the expression of the mouth,—but before she had had time to look away, she saw that the stranger's eyes smiled.

Perhaps he was about to speak to her! . . . . This would be almost *too* much! . . . . It was all so new,—so strange,—so unaccountable! . . . .

But, just then,—with a shrieking,—grating, exeruciating sound,—the train stopped at one of the intermediate stations, and an elderly lady,—carrying a basket and a swathed bundle,—advanced to the window.

All the other carriages were apparently full, and a porter opened the door for her.

The stranger assisted her courteously to deposit her parcels, but not before he had glanced quickly at Lucy with an expression she dared hardly interpret,—and yet, it seemed to say,—as plainly as words,—how much he was annoyed at this unexpected intrusion. His eyes assumed the look of regret which she had already observed. All the laughter had gone out of them.

It is curious to note how,—when two people have commenced a railway-journey together,—even supposing that they have never spoken a word,—and experience, one for the other, no

particular feeling of sympathy,—the arrival of a third person, upon the scene, appears, nevertheless, always to partake of the nature of an intrusion. It speaks well for human nature that it is so, inasmuch as it goes to prove that all men are not consumed by an insatiable craving after new faces,—and, upon the entrance of the almost invariably unwelcome third person,—the two established fellow-travellers nearly always exchange glances which seem plainly to mean,—

‘*You were my first travelling-companion,* although we have never spoken a word, and I know nothing whatever about you :—still,—I infinitely prefer you to this troublesome new-comer, and shall continue to do so to the end of the journey !’

Perhaps this was the true interpretation of the regretful look in the eyes of the princely stranger, or, perhaps, he may have been thinking,—not without some self-reproach :—

‘Here was a pretty and seemingly amiable young lady, with whom I might have struck up quite a friendship, if only I had been able to keep myself awake. *Now*, however, the moment has passed by. A murrain upon this tiresome old woman and her bundles !’

But blessings come to us sometimes in the disguise of curses. The swathed-up bundle, as it turned out, contained a very curious and rare-looking foreign dog. It had a fine foxy coat, a black nose, and a black tongue, and seemed to be, altogether, a remarkably intelligent animal, rejoicing in the name of 'Changie,' or 'Chang,' although, as its mistress presently explained to Lucy, 'he was a female dog.'

Now that this elderly lady was seated between them, Lucy no longer experienced so great a sense of embarrassment. Possibly 'Changie's' mistress may have acted as a buffer, and may have arrested, or absorbed, some sort of mysterious magnetic current; and as she possessed that kind of exterior which effectually protects a woman from the impertinent advances of man, she appeared to be perfectly at her ease with the stranger, of whose subtle fascination she was probably utterly unconscious.

'Changie,' who seemed to be one of the most sociable of 'female dogs,' commenced, at once, making friendly overtures to the stranger, opposite to whom the elderly lady had seated herself.

The stranger inquired as to 'Changie's' exact species, and was informed that he (or *she*) was a

'Chinese edible-dog,' and that when young, such animals were looked upon as great delicacies amongst the Celestials. Some very interesting conversation followed upon the subject of dogs in the abstract.

Lucy had been quite right about the stranger's voice. He spoke as she had expected and hoped that he would speak; but (at least so it seemed to her) as she had never heard mortal man speak before.

He appealed to her several times upon the question of canine friendships, and she soon found herself thoroughly involved in the conversation.

By-and-by, however, a most foolish and ridiculous mistake, upon the part of the elderly lady, recalled all Lucy's blushes.

Notwithstanding that she and the stranger were seated so far apart; or, perhaps, indeed, *because of it*; or else, because Lucy's parasol happened to be leaning up against one corner of the centre compartment of the carriage, and the stranger's umbrella against the other,—this absurd old woman, with the Chinese-edible-female-dog, proceeded to show, by her conversation, that she actually took the princely stranger for Lucy's husband! . . . .

The laughter came again into his eyes at this mistake, and, after seeming to ask permission with those same wonderful grey eyes that could ask, or say, almost anything, he made a few jesting remarks which were calculated rather to confirm their fellow-traveller in her error.

Lucy felt too terribly embarrassed to remonstrate with him. She could only murmur something incoherent by way of protest. But the elderly lady was a little deaf, and persisted in her absurd blunder until the train arrived at Hampton Court.

Here, the stranger, after helping out ‘Changie’s’ mistress with her small baggage, turned to assist Lucy, who, owing to the position of her seat, was constrained to descend the last. In order the better to do so, he took her hand.

‘Good-bye !’ he whispered, rather than said, as she alighted upon the platform.

A short, stumpy-looking man, in uniform, with enormous moustaches, who was standing close by, awaiting, apparently, the arrival of a friend, looked round, as the stranger stepped upon the platform, and gave him a sort of military salute, and at the same moment a pretty young lady, in rather a sensational hat, bowed somewhat

formally as she passed quickly towards the further end of the train.

'I hope I am right,' said the stumpy man, advancing, and addressing himself to the stranger, 'in supposing that you must have had a very pleasant Sunday at Cowes? The weather has been splendid here.' To which remark Lucy did not catch her fellow-traveller's reply.

So he had been to Cowes, then;—Cowes, in the Isle of Wight,—where Mr. Podmore had lately passed his too brief holiday, but the two must have journeyed, (she thought,) by totally different ways.

The people assembled upon the platform were beginning now to disperse. But the pretty young lady wearing the smart hat was still questioning porters excitedly, and peering into empty carriages.

A minute afterwards she rushed up to Lucy, who was in the act of claiming her box.

It was Miss Adeliza Binks. Mrs. Guffy,—Lady Mabella's maid,—had escorted her to the station, but young Algernon Binks had, seemingly, not condescended to come.

The tall stranger had, by this time, obtained his portmanteau, and was sauntering off, with the stumpy man, in the direction of the bridge.

'We are going over in a boat,' said Adeliza Binks; 'it will land us close to the door of our apartments, which are quite separate from the rest of the Palace. How odd that I shouldn't have seen you at first!'

'A lady carrying a dog was standing between me and the window,' Lucy explained.

The truth was, that, at that moment, she had been so entirely preoccupied, that she had almost forgotten the existence of the Binkses altogether.

They were making their way now, towards 'the river-strand,' where the boat was awaiting them. Lucy could see the tall form of the princely stranger crossing the bridge with his companion. It occurred to her that she could, perhaps, discover who he was.

'You passed by the window of the carriage,' she said to her cousin; 'but I couldn't be sure that it was you. You bowed to a gentleman who was standing close by.'

'That was our champion-tennis-player,' returned Miss Binks, whilst Lucy's heart began beating in quite an unusual manner. 'And we're very proud of him, I can assure you! He's the Veterinary-Surgeon of the 18th Lancers.'

## CHAPTER XII.

‘I DARESAY you will often write to me,’ Miss Elizabeth had said to her great-niece previously to her departure from Barlow Lodge, and, accordingly, upon the morning following upon her arrival at Hampton Court Palace, Lucy seated herself soon after breakfast at the writing-table in the bay-window which commanded a view of the river, the bridge, and the cavalry barracks, and wrote as follows:—

‘*Hampton Court Palace,*  
‘*Tuesday morning.*

‘MY DEAREST AUNTY,—

‘You will, I know, be glad to hear that I arrived here quite safely yesterday afternoon. The train was very full indeed, and some of the people seemed to be of rather a disagreeable kind, but I was very fortunate in having only a lady

and gentleman in the same carriage with me. The lady, who was rather deaf, had a very clever and uncommon kind of dog, which she said was of the kind that is eaten in China when young. His name was "Chang," although she said it was a female, and it had black gums, and a black tongue, and a tail that curled up just like a fox's (*sic*). At Hampton Court I was met by cousin Addie, and Mrs. Guffy—Aunt Mabel's maid—who is rather cross and sour-looking and has bad health, but I shall try, of course, to give her as little trouble as I possibly can. I think cousin Addie is *handsome*, rather than pretty,—as she is so tall and stately-looking. I admire her eyebrows very much, and her complexion,—which is quite wonderful; but I have no doubt you remember what she is like. She seems to think a good deal about looks,—as one would one's self, I daresay, if one was at all like her. She is certainly a great contrast to her mother, for there is not the slightest resemblance between them. I am afraid poor Aunt Mabel can't be very strong. She has a very sad and complaining manner, and, Addie tells me, takes great quantities of medicine; but I suppose she was very fond of poor uncle Orlando, and feels his loss. You asked me to say

how she was looking, and whether she had taken, yet, to wearing caps. She *does* wear one, and dresses very plainly indeed,—in black,—with a little black shawl crossed over in front which quite hides the way in which her gowns are made,—but she is, all the same, very kind indeed. Cousin Algernon did not come to the station to meet me, but Addie took me to the door of his room soon after we arrived, where he was smoking and preparing for the Army. He did not know that I was there, and asked if I had come,—speaking of me as “the pattern Clapham girl.” I determined, however, that I would not be offended with a boy of that age,—particularly as he was my own relation,—so I only answered that I did not *feel* “pattern” at all, and feared that I was anything *but* that. He looked very much ashamed, though he tried hard to carry it off, and blushed right up to the roots of his hair, which is quite light. He has since put on quite a different manner, and though I don’t suppose I shall like him as much as his sister, I daresay we shall end by becoming very good friends. I had just time to go round the gardens before dressing for dinner, and admired them immensely. Although they are rather formal, there is a great

charm about them; and I thought so much about Henry VIII., and Anne Boleyn, and Cardinal Wolsey, and poor Jane Seymour, whilst I was trying to talk about other things, for Adeliza and Algernon do not seem to care very much about history. We went into the private garden, where there is an orangery, and a very nice mysterious shady walk, up some stone steps. Addie said she went there to get away from the tourists,—as she calls the people who do not live in the Palace, but only come down from London to see it. These people generally come,—it seems,—in large crowds by cheap excursion-trains, and eat oranges, and red-herrings, in the gardens, and then leave their skins and tails done up in newspaper upon the seats in the gardens,—after which they go into Bushey-Park and play a vulgar game called “kiss-in-the-ring.” The ladies of the Palace seem to have a great feeling of horror and contempt for these tourists, and of course it is very horrid and disgusting of them to behave in this dreadful way! I was astonished to find that the people who live in the Palace should be so discontented,—thinking that they would have been more grateful to the Queen for having given them these rooms, and so saved them the expense

of others. But Algy says life would not be worth having if one could not grumble, and it seems that the apartments differ very much with regard to goodness,—some being the most delightful places possible, and the others very little better than perfect cellars,—looking out into dreadfully dull court-yards paved with stones which are generally in a state of damp. The ladies who have got these bad rooms look with envy and hatred at all those who have been given better ones,—and Addie says, (only this I cannot quite believe!)—positively long for them to die, and rejoice whenever they see them looking ill in Chapel! . . Aunt Mabel's rooms, or, rather, the ones that have been lent her,—are more like a separate house, and there do not seem to be any of these dreadful cellary places. Algernon says that the three Miss Bolderos,—(the daughters of the late General Sir Hector Boldero,—of whom I daresay you have heard,—and who are going to-morrow evening to give a dance,)—actually keep a whole family of tame rabbits in a room which was intended for a servant's bedroom, but in which no servant can be found to sleep;—and this has made some other ladies, (whose names I forget) so dreadfully jealous, that they have made up their minds

to keep a pig ! All this is done merely to outwit the Authorities,—by whom, it seems, such things are not allowed. It is not allowed, either, by the Queen,—for the ladies who like to have their washing done at home from economy,—to spread it out all over the roof of the Palace to dry, and I can quite fancy that it is a thing one would dislike one's self in her place. But it seems some of the ladies manage to evade this law all the same, as most of the apartments have a sort of parapet along by the top-windows,—where the washing can be concealed, so that it can only be seen from the train. Addie asked me if I had noticed *theirs* as I was coming along,—but I certainly did not do so, perhaps because I was not looking out for it. She says, however, that Mrs. Guffy, who will not “get up” even a *necktie* at home,—to save anyone's life, has “entered nobly into the spirit of the thing,” and washes out nearly all Aunt Mabel's and Addie's things as well as her own,—only just because she knows it is forbidden ! And Addie says she goes in daily fear of “a raid upon them by the Board of Works”—(I am nearly sure this was the Board,)—which happened, it seems—only a few years ago—when the eldest of the three Miss Bolderos had nearly

all her clothes confiscated, and had to sleep for more than a fortnight in a borrowed nightgown! I think, however, that, as I am a new arrival, they very likely tell me things that are not *quite* true, and exaggerate others in which there may be, perhaps, just a germ of truth! . . Tell Sarah to tell her sister that I wore my new white dress at dinner, and that I really think it looked very nice. It is a very good fit,—although just a little too tight across the middle part of the chest. This, however, can be easily altered when I return, and, for the present, I can leave the top-hook unfastened, and pin a bunch of geraniums,—or some rose-buds,—over the place. Lord Belmorris arrived just before dinner, and insisted upon taking me down, as he said he was in the position of master of the house, and that if he took down his own sister, he should feel “just like the King of Burmah.” (I have no idea what he meant by this,—and, indeed, I did not understand several other things he said, and made the most stupid mistakes about them,—as he makes use of a good many expressions *connected with the Turf*.) I must say, however, that he is very amusing,—although he does not talk much. He says things, however, in such an odd way, and

does not seem to be a bit proud,—having a horror of anything like show-off, which he calls by some sort of racing name. He is not at all like Aunt Mabel in the face, nor in his manner, and he looks a great deal younger. He is not very tall,—in fact, I should call him short. He told me however, that if he had been what is called “a fine man” he thinks he should have cut his throat,—as, then, he would not have been able to ride Steeplechases,—which he says is “the *second-best* thing in life.” (He did not tell me what he considered the *first* thing!)—I suppose he is not really good-looking, but he has a face that one likes, or believes in, directly one sees it, so that it is impossible to think him plain, and he has, also, very fine dark eyes, with a great deal of expression. I think he must have got what is called “dry wit,” as, when he says anything funny, he never laughs at it himself, but always looks particularly grave. He is quite clean-shaved, with very good teeth, and he seems to be nearly always smoking a tooth-pick. He dresses very much like a groom, and speaks a little like one, I think, as well; but he is very neat and clean-looking, and I think a good deal of this stable-helper-manner must be put on. He asked me if I was fond of

riding, and seemed amused when I said that I had only ridden a donkey upon Clapham Common when I was quite young. He says he must run down there and get up some donkey-races, and that you and he must talk the matter over together! After dinner, he asked me to go out with him into the passages,—which are just like cloisters, and most ghostly and mysterious by moonlight,—to look for a curious kind of spider which is called a “*Wolsey*”-spider,—because some people believe that it has something to do with the spirit of Cardinal Wolsey,—and which is of enormous size; but Aunt Mabel thought that I had better not go, as she was afraid that I might get a chill, as she says the evenings are sometimes rather damp from being so near the river,—and so, we ended by not going at all . . .’

Just as Lucy had got on thus far with her letter, young Algernon Binks dashed tumultuously into the room.

‘I say, girls!’ he called out,—addressing himself, however, chiefly to his sister—‘arn’t you going to look alive and come out for a run before I go to the Races? . . You’ll find me in the tennis-court,—looking on at the tennis. The “*Vet’s*” going to play a match with the Colonel!’

## CHAPTER XIII.

‘WOULD you like to come out, Lucy?’ Adeliza asked. ‘Mama won’t be ready for a long time, so we might start off before the sun gets too hot. She never goes any further than the first bench, and there are a good many interesting things to be seen.’

Lucy hastily concluded her letter, and rejoined her cousin after she had dressed herself for the gardens with becoming neatness.

As they crossed the open space in front of the house, on their way through the quadrangles into the Palace gardens, Lucy could not resist casting a shy glance in the direction of the cavalry barracks, which she had been told were occupied by a detachment of the 18th Lancers. Some of the soldiers, in shirt-sleeves, were grooming their chargers, which were clattering upon the paving-stones, but, here and there, other figures, in

picturesque uniform, were dotted about. Now and then a trumpet sounded. It was a most animated scene. At that distance it was not easy to distinguish the privates from the officers,—nor would Lucy's limited acquaintance with military matters have enabled her to do this even if the barracks had been nearer.

*One form*, however, she felt that she must have recognised at once, if only it had been in sight. . . . But had she not learnt just now that he was playing a match at tennis with the Colonel . . . ?

'I daresay,' said Adeliza, when they had proceeded a little further, 'that you would like to come first and look at the Chapel. We can get it over at once,—if you like,—for it will be best not to "do" the pictures till the heat of the day. Or shall we go and look on at the tennis?'

'I think it would be nice to go and look on at the tennis,' Lucy answered, feeling terribly guilty and embarrassed. (Her heart had begun to beat just in the same ridiculous manner as it did when she was on her way to the boat.) 'We shall be able to study the Chapel on Sunday.'

'Yes; it's much better to go first to the tennis,' said Miss Binks, 'because now we shall find Algy

there. Mama won't let me go and look on at it alone. She doesn't think it's the correct thing, because the men play at it in jerseys,—but then Mama is so dreadfully particular! The three Miss Bolderos are there nearly all day: I'm sure *I* can't see the harm of a jersey, can you?'

'I've never seen a game of real tennis,' returned Lucy, 'so I don't know in the least how the players are dressed. It will be quite a new experience.'

'Yes; it's much better fun than seeing the regular sights: but, somehow, I fancied you wouldn't care for it. I got it into my head that you were very religious, and fancied you would want to go at once and look at the Chapel!'

'And I hope, now,' said Lucy, smiling, 'that you don't look upon me as *quite* a heathen?'

'I shouldn't mind much if you *were!*' returned Adeliza; 'there's been a great deal too much religion, as it is, floating about in the family! I'm sure I shouldn't like to marry a very religious husband!'

'Still, one might be unhappy if one thought that he had no religion at all.'

'I don't think I should care much! Perhaps I've had too much of religion,—or perhaps,

it's not been of the right sort. Whenever I say this to Mama she turns up her eyes and sighs, and says that I don't know yet what marriage really is, and I always answer that I only wish that I *did!*'

'Is Aunt Mabel so very religious?'

'In an odd kind of way, yes:—but Mama's a very peculiar creature. She's got "*Faith*," and she likes sermons, and approves of family-prayers, and hates Free-thinkers. But she hasn't "*Works*," and she doesn't seem to have much "*Hope*," and as for "*Charity!*" . . . You'll find all this out for yourself, however, in time, and I hope you don't think badly of me for giving you a hint. I'm simply stating facts!'

Lucy,—who in common with most orphans, was possessed of quite an exaggerated feeling with respect to filial affection,—might certainly have been rather shocked, at any other time, at so crude an analysis, by a daughter, of the maternal peculiarities. At present, however, she was intensely preoccupied. 'And yet your mother seems so kind and so gentle!' was all that she answered. Her heart had anticipated her footsteps, and was already in the tennis-court.

'Yes,' continued Adeliza, with unfilial can-

dour, ‘she has always got that crushed, subdued, expiatory kind of look! People tell me that she’s just like a Saint upon a church-window,—but she’s very worldly with it all,—and oh, what an iron will! . . . I should like you, just for fun, to try to reason Mama out of anything she’s set her heart on! You might as well endeavour to turn the sun out of his appointed course! And then, her “comforts”! . . . You watch Mama when anybody else wants to get hold of her air-cushion, her foot-warmer, or her lamp-shade! . . . She’s like a tigress watching over her cubs!’

‘I liked Lord Belmorris very much,’ remarked Lucy,—merely for something to say,—‘he seems to be very amusing and good-natured! ’

‘A better creature never lived,’ returned her cousin; ‘he’s the very reverse of Mama in most things, and he’s about the only person she’s really afraid of. But *he* too, though you wouldn’t believe it, has a touch of the family cant. He’s awfully orthodox! Somebody asked him once, before me, if he didn’t think it silly to believe in Hell? . . . You *should* have seen his face! . . . Heaven and Hell, and the Church, and the State,

and the Bishops, and the Turf, and Steeple-chasing, are all connected together in his mind. He looks upon them all as purely *English*, and fancies that if you upset one of them, all the rest will go. He gets it from his father !'

' And was *he* very very religious ? ' Lucy spoke merely to conceal her nervousness, for they were emerging into the gardens, and must be, she thought, rapidly approaching the tennis-court. In reality, she would not have cared much, at that moment, had she been told that the late Lord Belmorris had been a worshipper of Juggernaut.

' He was anything but good when young,' replied Miss Binks ; ' but he turned religious when he became old. He used to walk about all night in Hessian boots, and pray, and disturb the people sleeping underneath him. *That* couldn't have been real religion ! '

' No ; a really religious person would have considered the feelings of others ! '

' Yes ; I'm sure you wouldn't like to have a husband who prayed in Hessian boots ! '

' No ; I shouldn't indeed ! ' replied Lucy, with a forced smile. They were quite near, now, to the turn leading to the tennis-court, and she could

hear the strokes, and the echoing voices of the players. . . . Oh, if her heart would only not go on beating *quite* so fast! . . .

But just as they came to the entrance to the tennis-court, they fell in with Algy.

'They're only knocking the balls about, and humbugging,' he said; 'it's no fun, as it isn't a regular match. You'd better come with me and look on at the drags. I'll just run home and get my glasses, and then I can go straight on to the races, if I happen to see a "pal."'

Adeliza turned, and retraced her steps in the direction of the façade of the Palace.

'We'll wait here for you,' she said, as Algy went in through the centre archway. 'Don't be long! If I had only known that we were going to look on] at the drags, I shouldn't have put on such a brute of a hat!'

'Then we're not going to look on at the tennis?' asked Lucy, with a sinking heart.

'Mama would make such a terrible fuss, if I went there without Algy! It's very ridiculous! Perhaps I can call him back, and make him take us;—ah,—he's gone out of sight!' . . .

There are some disappointments which,—without deserving to be classed as calamities,—

seem for the moment, to partake of their nature, and to fill the heart with a sense of absolute despair. To Lucy Barlow such experiences were entirely new, and upon realizing, in the present instance, how much her cousin's change of plan had affected her, she felt both surprised and humiliated. But the feeling of disappointment was there, casting quite a shadow over the sunshine!

She dared not remonstrate with Adeliza.—For the ‘pattern Clapham girl’ to endeavour,—upon the very first day after her arrival, to tempt her cousin into disobeying the maternal edict, would be, indeed, a miserable return for all Lady Mabella’s kindness!—With what rapid strides must she not be advancing towards some sort of moral degeneracy for the bare notion of any such ingratitude to have occurred to her mind!

So, in a state of unutterable despondency, she followed her cousin along the central façade of the Palace, towards the gateway of the private garden.

The sound of the tennis-playing grew fainter and fainter. Foolish tears had arisen in Lucy’s eyes.

By-and-by, Adeliza Binks exclaimed suddenly,—

‘Do you really think that this hat is so very unbecoming? I put it on for a shade,—and quite forgot what a monster I look in it.’

‘I like it much better than the one you wore yesterday,’ replied Lucy. ‘I should have said, too, that it was more becoming, but I know nothing about dress, so my opinion isn’t worth having.’

She spoke mournfully, and without much sympathy. She had accepted the inevitable, and felt more resigned, now, about the tennis, but to have pretended any interest in the becomingness of Adeliza’s hats would have displayed downright hypocrisy.

‘Well, then, I’ll tell you what, Lucy,’ said Miss Binks; ‘we’ll just go back and look in at the tennis for a moment,—after all, you see,—it isn’t as if I went alone,—I’ve got *you* with me,—besides which, we needn’t say anything about it to Mama!’

‘Oh, that *will* be delightful!’ exclaimed Lucy, the sunshine coming over everything again.

‘You are very fond of games, I suppose?’ Adeliza said, as though a little surprised at her enthusiasm.

'I've never had much to do with games,' answered Lucy, who was now looking radiant; 'but it will be very nice to go and see them playing at tennis!'

They entered the tennis-court unperceived by the players.

'The short one has just beaten the tall one in the grey jersey,' Adeliza explained, after she had questioned the marker. 'Perhaps they're not going to play any more.'

. . . Yes, he wore a grey jersey;—woven out of some sort of silvery, silken texture, which looked like chain-armour! His arms were partly bare, and now that his throat was unconfined by the stiff modern shirt-collar, he had more than ever the air of a knight of ancient days. Lucy could imagine that Ivanhoe might have appeared in some such guise before the enraptured gaze of Rowena, or the less fortunate Rebecca,—only, of course, Ivanhoe was not quite such a tall man. Could it be possible that he was *really* only a veterinary surgeon after all? . . . Had veterinary surgeons often the features and bearings of Crusaders? . . .

But here Lucy's conjectures were brought to an abrupt termination.

Ignorant, and unapprehensive of danger, unwarned by Adeliza, and absorbed in her contemplation, she was ineffectually standing in that portion of the gallery or passage which was unprotected by network, when he of the Crusader's face, raising his strong bare arm, sent a ball flying at random which struck her with such force on the forehead that she fell back stunned and insensible.

When she recovered consciousness, Adeliza Binks,—the short stumpy man of the railway-station,—the boy whose business it was to pick up the balls,—for the regular marker only attended when there was a regular match,—and the dealer of the blow himself, were all surrounding her anxiously. In the eyes that could say so much there was a look of genuine contrition. Miss Binks was loud in her lamentations.

'Good gracious! what an unfortunate thing to have happened! How *frightfully* annoyed Mama will be! . . . She'll be quite horrified to think that we came here at all! She told us we were never to come here by ourselves; . . . you play in jerseys . . .' Then,—seeing that Lucy had recovered her senses,—she added,—

'I hope and trust, Lucy, that you're not really hurt? Keep it dark from Mama for goodness sake, or we shall never hear the last of it! . . . Run!' (she exclaimed suddenly, addressing the short, stumpy man;—for there are moments when one does not pause to consider whether one is ordering about 'captain or colonel, knight, or man-at-arms!') . . . 'Run, for goodness sake, to Lady Mabella Binks's,—my mother's,—and ask for my brother Algernon,—who you remember playing billiards with: . . . Perhaps you'll meet him upon the way,—and tell him to tell Mama that we shan't be back to luncheon. . . . Tell him to make any excuse he likes,—I must think of somewhere to go to till my cousin's better, so that Mama mayn't find this out! . . . This is my first-cousin,—Miss Lucy Barlow!' . . .

She intended this for an introduction, but the stumpy man had already started off upon his errand.

'Oh, thank you!' said Lucy feebly. 'I seem to be giving everybody a great deal of trouble!'

'I know what I'll do!' exclaimed Miss Binks, as if suddenly inspired. 'I'll just go

round to the Miss Bolderos' and ask them to let you go in there and rest till you're recovered ! They're sure to ask us to luncheon,—they're so good-natured! . . . Please take care of her till I come back,' she added, turning to the grey jersey, 'and don't let her go outside, for goodness sake ! . . . She might just tumble up against Mama ! ' So saying Adeliza Binks caught up her sunshade and departed.

It was quite natural, Lucy thought, hazily,—that her cousin should leave her under the protection of a veterinary surgeon. A veterinary surgeon,—after all, was the next thing to a doctor.—A stunned horse had, probably, very much the same sensations as a stunned woman ! Nevertheless, the lad whose business it was to pick up the balls, remained staring at them open-eyed.

'Look here, my fine fellow,' said the author of all this commotion ; 'don't you think you could run off and fetch a glass of water for this young lady ? Take care that it's quite fresh ! . . .—I hope to heaven that I haven't hurt you ! ' he exclaimed earnestly as soon as they were alone together.

They were seated at the further end of the

narrow passage behind the protecting net. The daylight from above scarcely penetrated into this secluded corner. He leant forward towards her and took both her hands in his own.

' You forgive me?' he asked after a while, looking into her eyes remorsefully.

' Yes, of course I forgive you! I know you didn't mean to do it!'

She felt no pain now, only a strange sense of contentment. This man, who seemed at once to have established over her some sort of mysterious ascendancy, was near her now, and it was as though she needed nothing more. Surely there could be no other man in the whole world who looked so kind, so strong, so beautiful, so noble! . . .

He had pushed back the forage-cap he was wearing beyond the clearly defined sun-mark, and she could see the hair which was cut almost too close to curl, crooking itself into little twists and tendrils, and trying to fulfil its mission.

A tenderness she had never known before flooded her whole being. She had neither the power nor the will to withdraw her hands.

So that she might not meet his eyes, she looked down at their four clasped hands. Thence

her glance wandered to his bare arms, which resembled, she thought, the arms of a statue. By-and-by, a deep scar upon his right arm attracted her attention. Above this scar, an initial of some sort was tattooed inside a device representing a coiled serpent, the emblem of eternity.

Without examining too closely for good manners, Lucy could not discover at once what initial this serpent encircled. Her eyes, however, seemed to be riveted to the spot, and she was soon able to make out that it was the letter '*L*',—looking as though written in bluish ink.

This letter, with the scar beneath it, must, of course, possess a history. A romantic one,—very likely,—having to do, perhaps, with some manner of 'hair-breadth 'scape' in a foreign land. She felt thankful,—she scarce knew why,—that he had not succumbed to whatever danger had assailed him, but that he had lived to deal her this accidental blow in an English tennis-court,—whither he had come,—(and, surely, in this there must lurk something of mysterious presage!)—already marked and stamped with the letter '*L*',—her own initial! . . .

So the hurrying moments went by. It

seemed to her that this must be the realization of some dream which she had dreamed,—half unconsciously,—in the shadowy past years, and that all her previous existence must have been tending towards it. In this dim corner of the tennis-court at this old Palace, a revelation had come to her, which,—it was surely intended,—should, sooner or later,—come to us all. Adverse circumstances, however;—misfortunes, and the fashionable perversions of nature,—combine together,—in many instances,—to render this knowledge unattainable;—and so it happens that there are still thousands of living and breathing beings who walk the earth unconscious altogether of its sublimest mystery.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE widow of the late Lieut.-General Sir Hector Boldero, K.C.B., was mother of the three tallest and plainest young ladies in the whole of the Palace of Hampton Court. I have described them as '*young* ladies' merely on account of their spinsterhood,—for it was not possible that they could now be any longer really young.

The three Miss Bolderos had been known by sight for many years to the frequenters of Hampton Court, Thames-Ditton, and Bushey, and the failures and disappointments of these many years might well have filled any less valiant spirits with despair. But, from the late Lieut.-General Sir Hector Boldero, K.C.B.—(who, as we all know, having once distinguished himself by leading a forlorn hope, succeeded afterwards in gaining a succession of brilliant victories)—they had inherited characters of the most intrepid courage and determination, and, as yet, they showed no signs whatever of a surrender.

Out of compliment to their gallant father's first achievement,—they were known to the inhabitants of the Palace as 'the forlorn Hopes ;' but there was nothing to justify this name in their outward appearance,—and not being qualified, in this instance, to become a heart-searcher,—I cannot say whether they were, or were not, secretly 'forlorn.'

There were some people, it is true, who pretended to have remarked that the eldest of the three Miss Bolderos was becoming ‘just a little bit soured,’ but, during the course of so many barren and profitless years it is only natural that the disposition should undergo contrasting phases. We have most of us heard the story of

And yet, this very genius had spent three whole centuries in devising benevolent projects for the reward of the person who should eventually unseal him! He remained, however, cramped up in his copper flask, and became soured; and, perhaps, it may have been the

same, to some extent, with the eldest of the three Miss Bolderos.

This was the lady whose under-linen,—according to young Algernon Binks,—had been confiscated by the Board of Works, and who had slept, in consequence, ‘for more than a fortnight in a borrowed night-gown,’—so that,—unless the story was merely a gross exaggeration,—she had been brought in contact, also, with the workings of human tyranny, and “the insolence of Office.”

All the three Miss Bolderos were extremely tall and athletic-looking, and bore a marked likeness to their gallant father, for neither he nor his lady were at all the kind of people whose offspring would have been likely to resemble anybody else. They were called, respectively, ‘Di,’ ‘Tizzy,’ and ‘Beauty,’—the youngest sister having the same right to be considered handsome, as a one-eyed man has of reigning amongst the blind.

They had witnessed the advent and exodus of many different detachments of Cavalry during all the swift-footed years that had combined to rob them of their youthful bloom! As a rule, they had been extremely popular with the military, particularly in the old days. They had boated

with them, punted, fished, flirted, and danced with them;—lost themselves with them in the ‘Maze,’—(where, by-the-by, it would have been difficult, upon the occasion of my last visit to it,—to ‘lose’ so much as a red-herring!)—wandered with them over the picture-galleries,—searched with them in dark corridors, upon moonlight nights, for ‘*Wolsey*’-spiders, and admired them as they played at tennis or prayed in Chapel.

It was even whispered that Miss Beauty Boldero,—seeing that her sisters’ circumspection had been so poorly rewarded,—had chalked out for herself a rather more emancipated line of conduct than is generally approved,—and more than one old lady in the Palace could vouch for having surprised her and her military admirers in situations which proved that she was, to say the very least of it, in the habit of dancing, occasionally, upon the very brink of indecorum.

Be this how it may,—Lancer, Dragoon, and ‘bold Hussar’—if they had ever been smitten at all with the charms of Miss Beauty, or her two elder sisters, had loved and ridden away;—and now a detachment of Lancers was here again:—*blue* Lancers this time,—the last lot had been red ones. . . . .

At the moment of Lucy's misadventure, the three Miss Bolderos were arraying themselves in order to go out to look at the drags,—and hence it was that they had not been that morning to the tennis-court, where, as Adeliza had stated, they generally passed a good deal of their time.

Upon reaching their apartments, which were close by, Miss Binks went to them in their bedrooms, in order to explain the situation, and she then returned to the tennis-court to fetch her cousin. Lucy felt like a person in the midst of a delightful dream, who partly suspects its unreality, and dreads the awakening. Perhaps she was still half-stunned,—but, if so, to be half-stunned was anything but an unpleasant sensation! . . . She hoped that the tender look in those grey eyes,—the sympathy which seemed to have become established, for all time, between herself and a man who had been, until now, totally unknown, existed not only in her imagination! She hoped that she was not the victim of some sort of enchanting delusion consequent upon concussion of the brain!

When Adeliza returned to her friends' apartment, she was received by the three Miss Bolderos,—all ready equipped for their walk,—to whom Lucy was duly presented.

They had settled upon a complete plan of action.

Lucy was to remain quietly in their apartments until two o'clock, during which time they would go out with Adeliza to the Lion Gates opposite to Bushey Park, and look on at the people bound for the races,—taking this way because they would thus be sure of not falling in with Lady Mabella. Lucy, in the meantime, could go into Miss Beauty's bedroom,—which was very quiet and retired,—and lie down. Perhaps,—after she had had a little rest, she would feel quite recovered. If she was well enough by two o'clock, she could return with Adeliza to luncheon at Lady Mabella's; if not, she could partake of luncheon with them. Their mother, Lady Boldero, would not, they declared, interfere with her repose in the least,—as she was bed-ridden, and never by any chance went out of her own room.

'They keep her somewhere hidden away with the tame rabbits!' whispered Adeliza, whilst the Miss Bolderos went outside to give some final directions to their maid-servant.

'You find us in the most terrible state of confusion,' remarked Miss Di, when these directions

were given. ‘We’re in the middle of our preparations for our little dance to-morrow, and they’ve very nearly driven us mad! We hope so much,’ she added, turning to Lucy, ‘that you’ll be well enough to come to it?’

‘Lucy will be quite delighted, I’m sure,’ said Adeliza, answering for her cousin; ‘she’s certain to be all right by to-morrow.’

‘We’re going out now,’ explained Miss Tizzy, ‘as regular “fishers of men,”—for, as it is, we’ve only one man to every three women. We shall have to dance with each other, in Spurgeonesque style!’

‘Perhaps we may see some men we know upon the coaches,’ suggested Miss Beauty; ‘if so, we could send them notes by your brother,—Mr Algry,—and tell him to drag them here to-morrow by the hairs of their heads!’

‘Our military men,’ said Di, ‘who would have been the saving of us, have played us false in the most abominable way!’

‘Owing to the numerous casualties,’ said Tizzy, ‘we are positively reduced to that miserable little Pycroft “*pour tout potage!*”’

‘I’m sure poor Charlie Sparshott couldn’t help breaking his arm steeplechasing,’ protested

Adeliza. ‘He wouldn’t have done it for worlds if he could have avoided it, as he was looking forward so immensely to the race-week.’

‘You know, I suppose,’ said Miss Beauty, archly, addressing Lucy, ‘how very “hard hit” your cousin is in that direction?’

‘She doesn’t know anything about me yet, do you, Lucy?’ cut in Adeliza, blushing; ‘for we’ve never seen much of each other since we were infants in arms. Well, if I said that I didn’t miss Captain Sparshott, I should be telling an untruth! I *do* miss him awfully, and I think him the greatest darling in the world!’

‘There’s nothing like telling one’s love, is there?’ said Beauty, smiling. ‘Addie isn’t the sort of girl to let concealment “feed on her damask cheek!”’

‘I’m sure *you* oughtn’t to talk, Beauty!’ cried her eldest sister, sarcastically. ‘You’ve heard of Beauty’s last flame, haven’t you, Addie? Would you believe it, she’s got up quite a furious flirtation with the “Vet,” and she’s insisted upon our asking him here to-morrow evening!’

It was now Miss Beauty’s turn to blush and look sheepish.

‘The Vet is a perfect gentleman,’ she said at

last ; ‘ and a very gallant soldier besides, who’s been in battle. He’s quite fit to be invited anywhere ! ’

‘ It’s simply a case of precedent,’ explained Tizzy,—as though to cover her sister’s blushes. ‘ Mama recollects a Veterinary-Surgeon’s going once before to a dance in the Palace. We’ve been guided entirely by this ! ’

‘ This one is an enormous improvement upon any of the “ Vets ” that have been quartered here in *my* time ! ’ said Miss Beauty with true courage. ‘ Besides which,—although he may not be very rich,—he’s of exceedingly old family ! ’

‘ Oh, yes ;—of very old family indeed ! ’ scoffed Miss Di, laughing. ‘ I’m constantly falling in with his illustrious relatives,—particularly when I’m sitting under the lime-trees by the water ! . . . . However, as we can’t make sure of that erratic Colonel, who seems to be “ here, there, and everywhere ” at once, and is supposed now to be quartered at Hounslow,—*only* he happens to be here to-day,—and as Captain Sparshott’s met with this unlucky accident, and little Pycroft is no better than a baby,—we’ve given the silly child her head, and the “ Vet ” is invited ! Probably he’ll represent the squadron ! ’

'But I suppose,' said Adeliza, 'that you went through the form of asking Colonel Hepburn? Although he's not a marrying man, and is no good to any one, that wouldn't matter for one evening. At any rate he's *a man!*'

'Yes; we have invited him, of course,' replied Miss Tizzy; 'we thought he would produce a certain effect in the ball-room, even if he didn't dance. I don't think there's a *chance* of his coming, however. But, anyhow, I think we may count upon the "Vet." Miss Barlow must promise to dance with him!'

This kind of flippant and irreverent banter was in the highest degree distasteful to Lucy. She had never been accustomed to anything of the sort, and did not quite know how to distinguish between what was intended seriously, and what was meant merely for jest. It was painful, too, to hear the man that she had raised, half unconsciously, upon a pinnacle, spoken of in a tone of ridicule and disparagement. It did not change her own opinion of him, of course,—on the contrary,—it turned her, as it were, into his secret, though devoted champion. Taken, however, as an indication of the esteem and admiration with which he was regarded by others,

it was, certainly, in some sense, humiliating! . . . Was she then, mistaken in her high though hasty estimate? Could it be possible that,—to these other women,—with the exception, perhaps, of Miss Beauty,—he seemed all other than he had seemed to her? . . . . Perhaps,—in her present abnormal state, some of these conflicting emotions may have displayed themselves outwardly.

‘Dear me, Miss Barlow!’ exclaimed Tizzy, with sudden concern. ‘How dreadfully pale you look! I think we’d better give you a glass of our fine old Marsala,—at twenty-four shillings the dozen!’

She left the room, and returned presently with the wine.

Lucy drank some of it, and experienced an agreeable glow.

‘Unless we start off at once,’ said Adeliza, ‘we shall miss seeing anything at all, and Algy will be gone to the races.’

The three Miss Bolderos assented, and after they had explained to Lucy the situation of Beauty’s bed-room, and begged her to make herself thoroughly at home, they started off with Adeliza upon their ‘man-hunt,’—chattering and laughing as they went.

'I think I might have promised you a very nice little contribution for to-morrow night,' Lucy could hear her cousin saying, as they passed down the echoing passages, 'in the shape of a highly-eligible bachelor-uncle,—only forty-three next November ;—but I'm sorry to say we can never get him to go to a ball! . . . . Perhaps Beauty wouldn't admire him quite so much as she does the "Vet," but he looks capital in the evening,—when he's dressed up with his white tie and an expensive flower in his button-hole!' . . . . Then, the voices died away in the distance,

## CHAPTER XV.

LADY BOLDERO's rooms at Hampton Court Palace seemed to be nearly all of them upon the ground-floor. Miss Beauty's shrine, at any rate, to which Lucy repaired as soon as she found herself alone, was upon a level with the drawing-room.

It was a small, cosily-furnished nook, adorned with quaint, old-fashioned prints, and the accumulated treasures of years. Close to the bed—which was very small for so tall a person—was a bookcase, filled with well-thumbed books, treating upon a variety of subjects.

The little hurrying clock upon the mantelpiece warned Lucy that if she desired to rest for an hour before luncheon, she had not much time to lose, so, throwing herself upon the narrow bed, she took up a book at random, with the view of reading herself to sleep.

But it is not everybody who can go to sleep

at midday, once they have arisen for good ; besides which, Lucy had chanced upon a thoroughly absorbing book !

It was the “*Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre*” of Octave Feuillet, which, describing as it does, the love of a haughty damsel—unsuspected, at first, even by herself—for a man in a subordinate position, riveted Lucy’s attention at once. The young lady, it seemed, was surrounded, also, by people who sneered and scoffed at the one who had unconsciously become her ideal. The coincidence was certainly very remarkable! . . . .

Miss Beauty, too, must evidently have been struck by it, for the book was scored and annotated in several places. She must have been reading it that very morning,—as Lucy found it lying upon the dressing-table, with a long hair-pin between the leaves as a book-mark.

Guided by this hair-pin, Lucy devoured eagerly the passionate love-scene in the ‘*Tour d’Elven*,’—applying feverishly every word that could have any possible connexion with her own situation. Those who have read the story will remember, perhaps, that Maxime and Marguerite, finding themselves alone together, one evening, in a deserted tower, have the key of it turned

upon them by the shepherd who acts as caretaker, and who fancies that they have departed, whereas they are, in reality, admiring the moonlit view from a ruined window overlooking an abyss. Finding that they are prisoners, Marguerite accuses Maxime of having bribed the shepherd from a desire to compromise her; and indignant at being suspected of such baseness,—he first of all makes an avowal of his love, and then, in spite of her tears and entreaties, flings himself from the ruined window into the abyss beneath.

Notwithstanding Monsieur de la Vieilleroche's admirable lessons in the French language, Lucy was at a loss to know why Marguerite should have been so terribly severe; and her blood seemed positively to run cold, when, placing herself in the heroine's situation, she beheld, in fancy, her beautiful Crusader taking this fearful leap. She knew,—she felt,—that she could never have resisted Maxime's passionate appeal when he turned and addressed Marguerite on his way to the window:—

*'Marguerite . . . écoutez bien! . . . je vous aime, c'est vrai, et jamais amour plus ardent, plus désintéressé, plus saint, n'est entré dans le cœur d'un*

*homme! . . . Mais vous aussi, vous m'aimez . . . vous m'aimez malheureuse! . . . et vous me tuez! vous me brisez le cœur! . . . mais ce cœur, il est à vous! Vous pouvez ne faire ce qu'il vous plaît . . . Quand à mon honneur, il est à moi, et je le garde! Et sur cet honneur, je vous fais serment que si je meurs, vous me pleurerez . . .*

Lucy knew,—she felt certain,—that, upon hearing such words from the lips of one that she loved,—she would have flown towards him in an agony of apprehension;—by no manner of means could she have kept herself back;—she would have seized hold of him by his coat-tails,—by his grey jersey,—by anything that he might happen to have had on at the time,—and endeavoured with all her might and main to deter him from his rash purpose,—failing which,—she must have precipitated herself from the window after him! . . . French girls, however,—she supposed,—were altogether different. . . .

Miss Beauty, at any rate, had, to some extent, shared in Lucy's sentiments. Maxime's speech was deeply underlined, in pencil, and the margin was crowded with annotations, such as,—

‘Stuff!’ . . . ‘Nonsense!’ . . . ‘Utterly untrue to nature!’ . . . ‘Is it likely that any girl

who was lucky enough to be locked up with the man she liked, would behave in such an idiotic manner?' &c., &c., &c.

Lucy rose from the bed and found the pencil which had probably written these words, and, upon the inside of an envelope which she happened to have about her, copied out several of the more emotional passages. Then, she threw herself upon the bed again, and, whether in consequence of the blow received in the tennis-court, or the glass of Lady Boldero's old Marsala, 'at twenty-four shillings the dozen,'—fell into a profound slumber.

It is possible that she may not have actually slept for more than ten minutes,—but, as often happens when that portion of the brain upon which our visions depend, is unduly stimulated, her dream during that short period may take a whole page or more to describe,—whilst the number of personages who took part in it, could by no manner of means have crammed themselves into Miss Beauty's bedroom, and would, indeed, have caused quite an inconvenient crush if they had been turned loose in Lady Boldero's whole suite of apartments.

It was evident from Lucy's dream, that (half

unconsciously, perhaps), her mind was occupied by one absorbing question, sub-divided, again, into others of lesser moment,—whether there was any just cause or impediment why she,—Lucy Barlow, of Barlow Lodge, in the county of Surrey,—should not unite herself in marriage with quite the most beautiful and noble-looking Veterinary Surgeon in the world—(for of this fact she could not but feel assured)—supposing she was destined to be so supremely blessed as that he should ever care for her? . . . . What effect the idea of such a possible union would be likely to produce upon her great-aunt Elizabeth, whose soul seemed to be filled with such an exaggerated sense of the importance of her own family? . . . . Whether the Barlows were, really and truly, such a very illustrious family after all? . . . . And whether a noble Veterinary Surgeon was not every whit as eligible as a vulgar, common-looking City Stockbroker, (for in this light she had come to regard ‘that magnificent Podmore’ when tried in the balance of comparison!) . . . . Had not Lady Valentina de Bohun,—herself the daughter of a really illustrious house,—actually eloped with her father’s physician?—And, taking everything into consideration,—if

she was destined to make what the narrow-minded might choose to look upon as an unequal marriage,—she would very much prefer,—for her own part,—a doctor of horses to a doctor of men. . . . Of course, Lucy said to herself,—If one made up one's mind to marry a doctor, one would wish him to succeed in his profession. He could not neglect his patients, however disagreeable they might be to him, personally,—*or*, (and this was a terrible aspect of the case!)—*however attractive!* . . . Would it not make one very jealous and wretched to think,—whilst one was sitting, waiting, all alone, at home,—with the dinner gradually getting colder and colder,—that one's husband was lolling, perhaps, on a luxurious sofa in some Belgravian drawing-room,—by the side of a lovely and fashionable being,—feeling her pulse, and listening to all her distressing symptoms? But no wife, however foolishly fond she might be, *could* reasonably be jealous *of a horse!* . . .

Musing and meditating thus, Lucy Barlow fell asleep, and then it was, that whilst the hands of the pert little timepiece,—which seemed so bent upon asserting its own importance,—went fidgeting round from a quarter past one to the

half-hour,—she dreamed the following utterly preposterous and ridiculous dream:—

She fancied that she was sitting alone, in the little parlour at Barlow Lodge, and that these very same questions were agitating and perplexing her mind. At one moment it seemed to her as if the existence she would have chosen for herself was absolutely unattainable;—then, —again, she felt almost tempted, like Lady Valentina de Bohun, to take the law into her own hands. . . . But as she was debating thus, the front-door bell began ringing furiously, and she became aware,—soon afterwards,—of an alarming clatter in the entrance-hall. Anon, the sitting-room door was thrown open tumultuously, and in rushed a whole host of warlike figures, which she knew instinctively to be those of the grand old mediæval Barlows,—coming upon her in a body,—Sir Percival, Sir Borlase, and Sir Humphrey de Barlow,—they were all of them there; only, because these had had the honour and glory of being Crusaders, they were obliged to enter the room in a curious crab-like fashion,—with legs crossed and knees bended,—just as she had often pictured them to herself lying in effigy. They came into the room hewing and slashing

their way, and flourishing aloft their battle-axes ; but although their chain-armour seemed to clank and rattle as they went,—lo and behold ! when she came to examine into it more closely, she perceived that it was not chain-armour at all, but that they were all clothed in soft grey silk jerseys, which only had the effect of steel at a distance ! . . . . Last of all came Griffinhoofe, the Lay Abbot of St. Opportune,—bearing the hereditary Barlow Great Seal upon its quilted satin mat,—which seemed to have swelled itself out to almost the dimensions of a sofa-cushion !

With the most violent gestures of displeasure, they came waddling towards her, scowling at her from under their plumed helms surmounted by the great red Lion-rampant of their race, and slashing, as they went, at all Miss Elizabeth's best Chippendale furniture, until the chairs and tables were so hacked and hewn about the legs, that several of them were constrained,—like 'Widderington,' in the old ballad,—to fall upon their knees !—The warriors also smashed up, and destroyed, all the Crown-Derby plates and dishes,—all the ribbed Worcester and Swansea tea-sets, and nearly all the blue pickle-jars, ginger-pots,

and other evidences of Commerce which came within their reach.

Finally, they arrived at Lucy herself (taking much longer about it than might have been expected, as very often happens in dreams), and began hacking at her furiously with their battle-axes.

But their blows were powerless to harm her.

Instantaneously, as it seemed, their glittering battle-axes had become transformed into tennis-rackets, and she was merely being softly patted and pummelled, that was all! . . . Foiled, as it appeared, in their endeavour to extirpate their degenerate descendant before she disgraced them by introducing into the family a strain of ignoble and contaminating blood, the three Crusaders next beckoned to the Lay Abbot of St. Opportune, who, advancing towards her with the hereditary Barlow Great Seal, sealed her down so securely in her chair with red-hot sealing-wax, that she was powerless to move either hand or foot; after which, they one and all of them disappeared in the direction of Clapham Junction, uttering 'slogans.' . . .

Then, whilst Lucy was in this miserably constrained and helpless position, there emerged out

of the biggest and bluest of the Oriental pickle-jars which had escaped intact, the figure of ‘John Barlow, Esquire, of Lesser Pucklington, Bucks, engaged in commerce,’ seemingly modelled out of pale wax, upon a dark background. What a nice, hale, beaming, *unmediæval* face it was! He seemed to come floating, floating, towards her, wearing a benevolent smile, and exclaimed with the convivial, but somewhat husky utterance of one who might, possibly, have assisted, quite recently, at some sort of civic entertainment :—

‘Marry a veterinary surgeon, my good girl? . . . Why! *of course* you can marry a veterinary surgeon! . . . “Illustrious early Barlows!” . . . Fudge! “Lay Abbot of St. Opportune!” Bosh! . . . “Lion-Rampant, flourishing battle-axe!” . . . Fiddlestick’s end! . . . Marry the man of your heart, my good girl!’ . . . (and Lucy was not quite, *quite* sure, in her dream, whether he properly accentuated the aspirate) . . . ‘only don’t make such a terrible “to do” about it! After all, you must remember, I was only an insolvent Alderman!’ And then he commenced hammering, and hammering, in the most good-natured manner in the world, at the masses of red sealing-wax with which she had been sealed down in her

chair, in order to free her from the trammels imposed upon her by her cruel ancestors ; rapping, rapping, rapping ; with an instrument very much resembling the best fiddle-pattern silver soup-ladle, and then, suddenly, with a start, Lucy Barlow awoke.

The rapping, she found, had not been purely imaginary, although at first she did not know whence it proceeded. By-and-by, however, she discovered that it came from a door opposite to the one by which she had entered the room. She rose, and went to it. It was not locked, and she turned the handle. ‘Perhaps,’ she thought, ‘I shall come upon the room in which they keep their tame rabbits !’

But the room, or rather *cupboard*, for it could scarcely be designated a ‘*room*,’ seemed only to be inhabited by band-boxes, which were piled up one on the top of the other, leaving scarcely any standing-space besides. At the further corner of it was a small open window, giving into one of the public corridors, and it was from the sill of this window that the rapping evidently came. A close grating, which protected it, so close, that it would have been next to impossible for the person who was without to see the one who was

within, except through much straining of eyesight, prevented Lucy from perceiving at once who it was that was rapping. By-and-by, however, she was able to descry the boy from the tennis-court, and she saw that he was thrusting the corner of a note through the iron grating. Her heart began beating furiously.

'Hist! . . . "Miss B. Boldero?"' inquired the lad, cautiously.

Ah! . . . of course the letter was not for *her*! . . . He could not possibly have guessed that she would be anywhere near this particular cupboard! . . . It was for Miss Beauty, of course, but it would be better to take it in for her. In a few minutes she would probably have returned. As Lucy put out her hand for the letter, the boy went on, confidentially:—

'I don't know, miss, if so be as it's *particular*, but I thought I'd best bring it round to this shop, same as t'others! . . . The gentleman at the tennis-court said I was to be sure and hand it to you directly you comed round, but you didn't not come round this morning at all, some other young ladies comed round instead of you, so I thought it best to bring it down here as usual.'

Surely, too surely, a clandestine correspon-

dence was being carried on between Miss Beauty Boldero and the fascinating ‘Vet!’ . . . Lucy dropped the note as though it had been a scorpion.

Then, seeing it lying there upon the cold stone floor, her heart relented, and she picked it up again.

What a noble, distinguished, independent, masculine handwriting! . . . The bold characters scored into the thick blue paper as if with a sword turned into a ploughshare! . . . A letter such as might have been dashed off upon a drum-head upon the field of battle! . . . A real warrior’s hand-writing! . . .

‘For used to iron brave and bold,  
His hands, I ween, could scarcely hold  
Or pen, or silken skein. . . .’

Somewhere, in an old border ballad, Lucy remembered to have read these lines, and they recurred to her now. The warrior in the ballad had been trying to wind some silk for a damsel, but his fingers were too strong for such soft pastime, and he snapt the skein! . . . Perhaps, after all, this letter, which aroused such conflicting emotions in Lucy’s breast, was nothing more than an answer to the invitation, which had been sent

to the writer, to the Bolderos' dance, for had she not already heard that he had been asked to it? . . . But, yet, the tennis-court boy had alluded to *other* letters, delivered after the same mysterious fashion! . . . There could be no doubt, at any rate, *who* the letter was from; for not only was the number and the motto of the regiment emblazoned upon the outside of the envelope, but beneath it was a seal, upon which was set forth the heraldic device of the writer himself. Lucy had acquired a habit of remarking these things. Was it because of the importance which her great-aunt always attached to them, or because she could see in fancy that vacant shield upon the Great Barlow blind? Anyhow, the crest upon the seal of this letter seemed, all at once, to invest with significance a stray sentence of Miss Di's, which had sounded strangely enigmatical to Lucy when it was uttered.

'Oh, yes, of very old family indeed!' she had exclaimed sneeringly. 'I'm constantly falling in with his illustrious relatives, particularly when I'm sitting under the lime-trees by the water!' And his crest (so Lucy perceived now) was some kind of wriggling serpent! . . . His name, most probably, had some connexion with asps or ser-

pents, and what creatures under the sun could possibly be said to be of older family? For not to count the Buddhistical Triratna with its twisted snakes (about which Lucy knew nothing whatsoever), was there not the wicked tempter of Scripture, the Brazen Serpent, Cleopatra's asp, a whole hotbed, in fact, of celebrated historical snakes? . . . Everything was as plain to her as possible now, and *there were serpents under the lime-trees by the water!* . . .

She had scarcely evolved all this to her satisfaction, and propped up the letter upon the white lace pin-cushion upon the dressing-table, when the four ladies returned from their morning man-hunt.

They were in high good humour, for they had secured (almost *for certain*) a good-looking young man employed in a third-rate Government office, and a well-preserved landed proprietor who had recently divorced his second wife, and was said to be anxious to re-marry. As both these gentlemen were staying in the immediate neighbourhood it was unlikely that they would disappoint them.

'And I'm quite sorry now,' remarked Miss Di., as they came trooping in to tell Lucy the good news, and to inquire after her well-being; 'that

we were in such a tremendous hurry to invite the  
“Vet!”’

‘By some lucky chance, he mayn’t be able to come,’ returned Miss Tizzy, as she sauntered up to the looking-glass to arrange her hair. ‘Ah! . . . here’s his answer! . . . Look here, Beauty!’ she called out to her youngest sister, who was still lingering in the drawing-room; ‘make haste and open this letter, and put an end to our anxiety! It’s the answer from Mr. Grubbe!’

## CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN one looked, first, at Lady Mabella Binks, and then at her two children, it was impossible not to be reminded of the barn-door fowl, about which I have read somewhere, who sat, by accident, upon some cockatrice's eggs, and hatched them by mistake. Could this mild, mean, Quakerish-looking little woman be really the mother of the brilliant, high-coloured Adeliza and the loquacious Algernon ; both of them so overflowing with energy and animal spirits ? . . . Surely there must have been an error *somewhere ! . . .*

Lady Mabella, as I have said already, was small and insignificant in appearance, and she looked even shorter than she really was, by reason of the humble and cringing attitude which she habitually assumed.

Ever since the demise of the late Mr. Binks, and very possibly before that, for the sake of

economy, she had dressed entirely in black, wearing over her dress, both morning and evening, and in all weathers, a light China-crape fringed shawl, too skimpy for even *her* slight figure, and which, when dragged tightly over the arms and shoulders, entirely suppressed and concealed anything in the shape of a bust, and lent her very much the appearance of a distressed needlewoman out of employment. The crushed, expiatory expression, to which Adeliza had made allusion, was almost always upon her face, whilst a little furrow, as of imperfectly subdued anguish, which became accentuated whenever she was required for anything like active service, contracted her somewhat narrow and bulbous brow. She rose late,—breakfasting alone in her own apartment, and retired early,—assuming ‘the recumbent position’ so frequently in the meanwhile, that one could almost fancy that she got up merely for the pleasure of lying down again. She ate but little in public, complaining bitterly, both at luncheon and dinner, of her unaccountable loss of appetite, but got through a good deal of nourishment in its more concentrated and sustaining forms during the course of the day, to judge by the trays of beef-tea, arrowroot, rum-

and-milk, &c., &c., which were continually being taken up to her bedroom.

Mrs. Guffy, her maid, who was also an invalid, had grown so like her from long association, that, but for the fact that she was much more handsomely dressed, as became one occupying a position requiring some manner of self-assertion, she might easily have done duty as her mistress's 'double.' The two were continually grumbling, condoling, comparing symptoms, applying remedies, and ministering to each other's discomforts, until one could not help feeling astonished that they were still alive. By pandering to one another's fancies, however, they obtained mutual concessions, and so were enabled to live on in some sort of harmony, although not without frequent differences of opinion.

The only person who seemed capable of bracing up Lady Mabella to any kind of physical activity, was her brother Lord Belmorris,—whose slightest wish was always regarded by her as law,—perhaps because she bore him a genuine sisterly affection,—perhaps merely because she was thinking of Algernon's future interests.

Upon the morning of the day appointed for

the Miss Bolderos' little dance,—the furrow upon Lady Mabella's brow had considerably deepened. Mrs. Guffy, too, appeared to be more than usually suffering. It was with difficulty that she could get through the lightest of her duties,—during which she was groaning audibly.

'Mama and Guffy are just like two bears with sore heads,' Adeliza remarked, as she took her place at the breakfast-table,—'they always *are* like this whenever there's anything pleasant in the evening. It's their way!'

Lord Belmorris and Algy started off early to the races,—having given up all idea,—in consequence of Lady Mabella's indisposition,—of returning to luncheon with any of their sporting friends;—and Adeliza spent the morning in waiting upon her mother and Mrs. Guffy with the view of conciliating them.

As the day wore on, however, they seemed only to grow worse and worse, and the two girls began seriously to fear that they might have to give up the evening's entertainment after all, as it was not likely that,—at Algy's tender age he would be considered a sufficient protector for them both, and Lord Belmorris never, by any chance, went to a ball! . . .

Lucy stole into her bed-room several times during the afternoon and looked regretfully at her new white dress,—for Mrs. Guffy had just mustered strength to lift it from its cupboard to the bed. Had she been told, only one short week ago,—that the idea of not going to a dance would have proved a bitter disappointment to her,—how she would have repudiated the notion of any such possible folly! . . .

If only they were enabled to go,—this evening after all,—she was determined to be very cold and distant in manner to the person who,—at least *externally*, looked so like a hero of romance!—She would *see* him,—however,—at any rate,—for she had heard that he had accepted the Miss Bolderos' invitation. When he was not looking at her,—and, perhaps,—in a crowd,—he might not be even conscious of her presence,—she could gaze, furtively, at the face which was, to her, as no other face that she had ever beheld! . . . But alas!—it was now very unlikely that they would be permitted to go to the dance at all!—And she found herself sighing as she turned away from the contemplation of her white dress.

All these anxious fears,—however,—were set

at rest when Lord Belmorris returned from the races.

After his own laconic fashion, he was in high good humour,—having,—as Adeliza suspected, accomplished some sort of pecuniary triumph,—which,—in spite of his large fortune,—always, (she said,) afforded him intense pleasure,—and, greatly to her surprise and satisfaction, he at once expressed his readiness to escort the two young ladies to the ball,—or rather, he proposed that Algy should look after his sister, whilst he, himself, took entire charge of ‘Miss Lucy,’—being,—as he explained to her,—‘more than double her own age, and her Welsh uncle, to boot!’ a fact of which she had certainly been quite unaware till now!

Lady Mabella cheered up a little when she found that no further exertions were required of her,—and was even induced to leave her bedroom and partake of dinner with her family. Lord Belmorris, repeating his remark relative to the King of Burmah, again escorted Lucy to her place. It was quite true, (she thought)—as she glanced at him timidly, that he looked ‘capital in the evening,—dressed up, with his white tie,’—he was spruceness and distinction

personified, and his ‘button-hole’ was so magnificent that,—as Adeliza remarked,—‘it looked just as if it was artificial.’

‘Put you on something, to-day, at the races, Miss Lucy,’ he said, as soon as they had settled themselves in their places. ‘You brought me good luck, and I’ve won you a “pony!”’

‘A *pony!*’ cried Lucy, astonished; ‘how *very* kind of you!’ but it flashed across her that, perhaps, at Barlow Lodge, the creature might prove something of a white elephant. Who in the world would look after it? She would have to groom it and saddle it herself! . . .

‘Yes; no more donkey-rides upon Clapham Common now!’ said his lordship, smiling at her ingenuousness.

The ‘pony’ did transport-duty for Lord Bel-morris’s ‘dry wit’ until after the removal of the fish, when Algy discovered to Lucy her misapprehension, for which she blushingly apologised,—wondering, (as she said,) how she ‘could possibly have imagined anything so very absurd!’

Notwithstanding this, and other agreeable banter, however, it seemed to Lucy that the dinner was of an extraordinary length. Perhaps,—had she visited the Binkses when they

were not entertaining company,—the luxury of their fare would have been much less apparent to her. But whenever Lord Belmorris honoured his sister with a visit, the whole establishment was stimulated to almost supernatural effort. Extra ‘hands’ were had in, the wine was of a superior brand, and the commissariat arrangements, generally, were upon a much more generous scale; for besides her anxiety that her brother should be well pleased with his reception, Lady Mabella could never forget that he kept a French ‘*chef*’ at home whose yearly wages came to just double the amount which had been received, per annum, by her husband,—the late Mr. Binks when he first began life as a curate.

However,—after ‘*Potage*,’ ‘*Poisson*,’ ‘*Entrées*,’ ‘*Rôt*,’ ‘*Entremet-au-sucre*’ (in the shape of an idealised tapioca-pudding, which Lucy of course refused), and a ‘*Chou-fleur-au-gratin*,’—a dish which his lordship had once been rash enough to praise, and with which the Binks’ cook had plied him steadily ever since,—whenever he happened to dine with his sister,—the repast came at length to a conclusion.

The three Miss Bolderos had particularly requested that, as their dance was to be quite a

'small and early' affair,—Adeliza and her party would arrive in good time, in order to form a kind of nucleus. So, while Lord Belmorris and his nephew were partaking of coffee, the two young ladies went up to their rooms to fetch their cloaks, and to give those few last finishing touches without which all female costume must seem incomplete.

Lucy was certainly experiencing an unusual sense of tremor and excitement, and, upon looking at herself in the glass, she scarcely recognised her own face. She was unable to decide whether she looked *better* or *worse* than usual, but she realised that she looked altogether *different*. Her cheeks were almost as pink as Adeliza's, and she surprised an expression of tenderness and anticipation in her brown eyes, which she never remembered to have seen there before. As she had always been accustomed to gather up her hair in very simple fashion, she had not been half so much incommoded as her cousin by Mrs. Guffy's indisposition, for of course they had neither of them ventured to ask for any assistance. She had found a bunch of blush-roses growing just outside her window, which, with permission, she had gathered. Two of these she had dis-

posed amongst her auburn tresses, whilst she had arranged the rest so as to form a breast-knot, in order to conceal the top hook of the new white dress, which, as we already know, ‘was just a little too tight across the middle part of the chest.’

Adeliza had obtained a key belonging to the Admiral’s widow, which unlocked a private door leading into one of the main corridors, so that they could thus proceed directly to Lady Boldero’s apartments without going outside through the draughty quadrangles.

When they were both quite ready they rejoined their male chaperons in the dining-room, having first bade good-night to Lady Mabella,—who had by this time retired to her own chamber.

Adeliza, who was in a great hurry to be gone, dashed off with her brother as soon as she had slipped into her opera-cloak,—whilst Lucy lingered politely for Lord Belmorris to knock the ash off his cigarette,—which he did,—she thought,—in a provokingly leisurely manner,—and to put on a light grey overcoat.

As he was helping her on with her own wraps, a real catastrophe,—though upon quite a small scale,—added to her impatience.

The bunch of roses which she had pinned so carefully on to the front of her dress,—to conceal the unfastened hook,—fell down upon the carpet in a hopeless state of dilapidation!—The stalks had been tied together too tightly, and every single rosebud, except one, was decapitated!

What was she to do?—For, of course, their severed heads would not serve her purpose, and to gather and re-arrange a new bouquet would cause another tiresome delay. But Lord Bel-morris, who was evidently a person of generous inspirations, had already removed the flowers from his own button-hole;—the magnificent arrangement of exotics and maiden-hair fern, which ‘looked just as if it was artificial!’

‘Oh, really, you mustn’t!’ cried Lucy, embarrassed by his unselfishness. ‘I ought not to deprive you of it! It looked so very nice in your coat. What will you do without it?’

Not being, apparently, a man of many words, and being perhaps a good deal confirmed in his natural taciturnity from the fact that he ‘seemed to be nearly always smoking a toothpick,’—his lordship, for all answer, commenced pinning it on to the place whence the rosebuds had been scattered, with the manner of a conscientious

chaperon, who has determined not to evade one jot or tittle of his night's work.

But men are generally awkward about such things, and the operation took time.

Lucy's heart was throbbing so violently with her impatience, that she was quite afraid that Lord Belmorris must perceive it.

The bouquet, however, was mounted upon wire, and the half of a letter which his lordship had just received,—was obliged to be folded round the stalks to prevent it from scratching.

At last it was adjusted securely.

'Oh, thank you, thank you!' cried Lucy, breathlessly. 'How clever you are! . . . But now you've got none for yourself!'

Again, he did not make any reply, but, stooping down, picked up from the floor the only rosebud which had retained its head, and adjusted it in his own button-hole.

They were now quite ready to start, and Lucy was soon tripping along the echoing corridors upon the arm of the nobleman, who, even in the midst of an iconoclastic age, persisted in believing in hell.

## CHAPTER XVII.

ADELIZA and Algernon had become quite tired of waiting for their relations at the door which communicated with the outer passages, and so they had gone on, leaving the key in the massive lock. This key had, of course, to be taken out again, and here was another cause for delay. From the very first, however, Lord Belmorris had seemed inclined to lag behind, as though in order to prolong the walk.

Upon all sorts of absurd pretexts, he endeavoured to arrest his young companion's attention, calling upon her to remark something quite trivial and unimportant, whilst she was thrilling with impatience to proceed.

'Expect to see anybody you like better than yourself?' he inquired by-and-by, as he again stopped her with a jerk of his arm. It was almost the first time he had really spoken to her

since dinner, and she was obliged to weigh his words a little before she replied.

'N—o ; oh, yes, of course I do !' she said, grasping his meaning at last. 'A great many people ! I don't think so much of myself as all that !'

'I do, though,' returned her chaperon,—as he clenched his white teeth, decidedly, upon his faithful toothpick ;—'for I'll tell you what ;—you're regular "Derby"-form !'

Lucy had not the faintest conception of his meaning. She was sure, however, from his manner, that a compliment was intended, and she did not like to appear ignorant.

'I wonder you should think that,' she replied, therefore, 'when you have a niece as pretty as Addie ;—she seems to me to make most other people look quite plain.'

'Wretched ! Miserable !' exclaimed his lordship, again stopping. 'Miserable, ordinary, "Plating"-form ! . . . That's what they all of them look by the side of *you* !'

'Derby'? . . . 'Plating'? . . . Ah, yes! . . . She felt she had grasped his meaning now! . . . Derby-china ;—Crown-Derby ;—the china which was,—very possibly,—more esteemed than most

other china, for plates. The difference, in fact,—between something ordinary in the way of crockery,—or human-clay,—and something which was rare, expensive, and highly-considered. . . . Her great-aunt Elizabeth, at Barlow Lodge, had some beautiful plates and dishes of Crown-Derby, which had always been very much admired. . . .

Upon this particular evening, Lucy could not help feeling grateful for these somewhat enigmatical compliments. Never before had she been so anxious and so diffident upon the subject of her personal appearance. If, however, it could at once strike a casual, and seemingly sincere, observer, that she was, as compared to other people,—what Miss Elizabeth's Crown-Derby plates were to the more ordinary china,—it was evident, at least, that she could not be looking her *worst*!

'I say, Addie,' whispered young Algernon Binks in his sister's ear,—as Lucy and her chaperon entered the dancing-room; 'do look at Lucy Barlow and my uncle Belmorris; they've actually exchanged "button-holes"!'

It was Algernon's habit,—when conversing,—to monopolise,—as it were,—his noble relative.

'He is *my* uncle, as well!' Adeliza used sometimes to remind him. *Now*, however, she was intent on other matters.

'Yes, I see,' she answered abstractedly, for she was craning to catch her reflection in a mirror which had, apparently, been hung to suit only the height and convenience of the daughters of Anak,—supposing these to have been as tall as the sons. 'It's a very good thing that she seems to be able to amuse him. Mama's nearly sure that he'll "stand" that dry champagne we had in on purpose for him, as he's always generous when he's been amused. I hear that he gave Guffy a sovereign just before dinner; I'm sure she didn't deserve it!'

As soon as Miss Binks had satisfied herself as to her own appearance,—she dragged off her 'highly-eligible bachelor-uncle' in search of the eldest Miss Boldero, to whom he was duly presented ;—for, although the name of Lady Boldero had appeared upon the invitation-card, she was much too old and infirm to take any part in the evening's entertainment.

How the sounds of the revelry must have interfered with her senile slumbers!—The tame rabbits, too, must have felt utterly scared and

confounded,—for the Bolderos' apartment was by no means spacious, and the music invaded every nook and cranny of it.

Lucy was left standing by the side of Algy. They were close to the musicians, who were in the middle of playing a valse, and she felt too much bewildered by her own emotions and by the strains of the music, to pay much attention to her cousin's boyish prattle.

By-and-by, Miss Tizzy came smilingly towards her, and introduced her to a partner. It was the short, stumpy man with the enormous moustaches, who had been playing tennis upon the previous day, and who she had understood was the Colonel of the 18th Lancers. The strains of the music, however, prevented her from catching his name.

'If I had not had the honour of being formally presented to you, Miss,' he said, as they paused together in a doorway after their first turn, 'I should, most likely, have ventured to break through the conventional trammels of society, in order to inquire after your health. I trust your sad accident, yesterday, did not make you feel very poorly?'

He spoke with the stilted and somewhat con-

strained manner which, Lucy doubted not, was peculiar to all colonels of regiments. Then,—after she had thanked him for his inquiries,—declaring that she now felt perfectly well :—

‘I consider,’ he went on, ‘that I am partly the cause of the misfortune myself. You see, I’m both right and left-handed at tennis,—and I owe a good deal of my success to this, I fancy. Well; my adversary was all for having a left-handed game,—just for practice,—and that ball he sent flying at your head was just a trial-stroke,—a “left-hander,” which he would never have thought of but for me.’

‘But, generally,—on other days,—when he plays with his right hand,—he plays very well, I suppose?’

She asked this with almost breathless interest. It seemed so good to hear about him,—even when all the information she could hope to gain concerned only his prowess in the tennis-court!

‘He is a player I am proud of for more reasons than one,’ replied Lucy’s partner; ‘being so long in the reach, too, gives him a decided advantage. In the present state of the detachment, however, neither the Colonel nor the Veterinary-gentleman can afford much time for amusement,

for we are in a very poor way for officers. You heard of the unfortunate accident to the Captain who was in command? And now I hear Mr. Pycroft is retained in town by the illness of a relation.'

'Captain Sparshott broke his arm at a steeple-chase, I believe?' . . . She remembered to have learnt this of the Miss Bolderos.

'He did so: and that reminds me, that I think I observed you in conversation with the Earl of Belmorris,—one of the finest riders we have in England. May I inquire if he is a relative of yours?'

'He's the brother of my aunt, Lady Mabella Binks,'—Lucy explained,—grateful for the interest evinced in her affairs by this gallant and respectful commanding-officer; 'but Lady Mabella is only my aunt by marriage. He is kindly taking care of my cousin and myself for this evening.'

'He is a real ornament to the Turf,' her companion rejoined, with admiration in his tones. 'I have been acquainted with him for some years, and have visited him at his country residence in the North. He began life as a soldier, and we were once in the same regiment. I held his lordship in the very highest esteem. He did not

mention, by chance, having received a communication from me this afternoon ?'

No ; his lordship had said nothing about it ;—but then he said so very little about anything, and seemed very seldom to refer to what related to himself.

Lucy and her partner took another short turn, but the room had become almost too crowded for dancing, and the musicians were just approaching the *finale*. Lucy's partner led her quickly towards a door in order to avoid the crush. He had perceived Lord Belmorris, and was about to pilot her to his side.

She looked up at this moment, and then, with a fluttering heart, turned from the gaze she dared not encounter. Lord Belmorris was only separated from her by a couple who were making, as *she* was, for the doorway, and, in the doorway itself,—his tall figure towering above the rest of the company,—stood the man she had been longing, dreading, praying, that she might meet, ever since she had first heard that he would be there ! He was leaning against the inside of the doorway,—his face wearing the look of somewhat haughty indifference which was its characteristic when in repose. Lord Belmorris,—

dwarfed (so Lucy thought) to miserable insignificance, seemed quite like a cock-sparrow confronting some bird of nobler plumage,—and the two were conversing together. All the men in the room,—except this one,—seemed to become immediately transformed, in Lucy's opinion, into creatures of an utterly different race,—gibbering and capering apes,—rather than the so-called lords of creation. All her soul looked forth from her eyes as they dwelt upon his face.—Then,—as if he had become conscious of it, he looked at her, and meeting her earnest, appealing gaze,—the expression of his whole countenance was transfigured.

'I have been waiting for you,' (his eyes seemed to say to her,) 'and you are here at last!'

She became pale and cold with emotion; it was as though his look was the expression of an appeal which she seemed utterly powerless to resist. She felt that, in another instant, she would have to go to him as he desired.

But just then, she heard the voice of the youngest Miss Boldero calling to her.

'Look here, Miss Barlow,—we must make an exchange. You are engaged to Mr. Algry

for this dance!' and Algy, to whom Lucy had promised the following dance, came forward to claim her.—Lucy's partner, at the same time, offered his arm to Miss Beauty, and led her away towards the tea-room.

At sight of Beauty in her coquettish gala costume, Lucy underwent a sudden revulsion of feeling. She hardened her heart, and hurling a look of timid defiance at the tall figure in the doorway,—turned aside upon the arm of Algernon Binks. She had declined going into the tea-room, fearing to pass by the door with its sentinel,—so, as the dancing had not yet recommenced, Algy led her out into one of the adjacent corridors.

'I hope you've forgiven me,' he said, when they got outside, 'for calling you the "pattern Clapham girl," just after you came? You see, we've had you held up over our heads, as perfection, for ever so long,—whenever we've done anything wrong, we've always been told that *you* wouldn't have done it, and you know, that ends by becoming a little trying! It's a way the mother has,—whether she knows anything about people or not.—But I see now that you're not "pattern" a bit!'

'Indeed, no!' returned Lucy fervently.

She was already repenting bitterly of her hard-heartedness. Supposing, when she returned to the ball-room she should find that a certain tall figure had disappeared? . . .

'But I never said,' Algernon Binks went on,—'that you weren't "*perfection!*!" Perfection and "*pattern*" are two very different pairs of shoes! You're looking most awfully pretty tonight, and you seem to have thoroughly "*fetched*" my uncle Belmorris,—I've been expecting to see him plunge into the mazes of the dance for the first time!'

'Lord Belmorris, then, doesn't generally dance?'

'No; but then he never *goes* to a dance, either. Once a fellow begins breaking down his own rules, you never know where he'll pull up!'

Lucy allowed Algy to go chattering on,—answering him just often enough to let him suppose that she was listening,—but she would have given worlds to have been alone. A thousand emotions,—the very existence of which had been hidden from her until now, were waging war in her breast. Foremost amongst them all,—seeing that she was quite unaccustomed to the in-

fliction of pain,—however slight and evanescent —was the thought that she had, perhaps, been guilty of an act of unkindness.

Might not a man, she asked herself,—particularly one occupying what was foolishly looked upon as an inferior social position,—feel himself slighted,—to say the least of it—by her seeming indifference? He had gazed at her so earnestly,—so appealingly,—and his eyes,—which could say so much,—had changed so suddenly, upon beholding her,—from grave to gay, and had said to her so distinctly, ‘Come!’ . . . Whereupon,—despising, as it were, the summons,—and eager,—as it must seem to him,—to show him that it was so despised,—she had turned straightway upon her heel, and left him where he was standing! In what more decided and brutal manner could she have shown him, in public,—that she scorned and rejected him,—that she repelled, with haughty indignation, any possible advances which he may have desired to make, and that,—to escape out of his presence,—she would even tolerate the society of a chattering boy like young Algernon Binks? . . .

But then,—just as her heart seemed to be overflowing with tenderness and contrition,—

young Algernon Binks,—leading her back by a shorter way to the tea-room,—directed her towards a secluded side-passage, wherein,—as ill luck would have it,—she perceived the little grated window which opened into Miss Beauty's cupboard. The letter upon the thick regimental writing-paper,—the secret method of its delivery,—the allusion made by the boy of the tennis-court to other letters delivered after a like manner,—combined with the gibes and sneers of the two elder of the 'Forlorn-Hopes,'—all went to prove, indisputably,—that the man whose face seemed to betray a mind above all human baseness,—was engaged in an unworthy flirtation with a vain and faded old maid,—in his choice of whom,—Lucy could not help suspecting.—he must have been guided solely by motives of self-interest! She did not suppose, of course, that the Miss Bolderos could be very well off. Their residence in the Palace,—on the contrary,—seemed to point to a narrowness of resources,—but perhaps (for a Veterinary-Surgeon) there might be some sort of triumph in winning the affections of a lady of such respectable social standing,—for, of course, the daughter of the late Lieut.-General Sir Hector Boldero, K.C.B., would

be received in the circles in which he was accustomed to move with open arms! . . .

And now, again, in Lucy's mind, all was bitterness, mistrust, and humiliation! Had she not,—led on by she knew not what fatal spirit of infatuation,—encouraged this man to some sort of extent, herself? . . . But then, how Fate seemed to have plotted and manœuvred to throw them together, and to establish between them all sorts of little secret understandings about which other people knew nothing whatever! . . . Why, for instance, when there were plenty of others, had he selected that one particular railway-carriage? . . . Why had that foolish old woman, with the edible Chinese dog, jumped immediately to the conclusion that they must be husband and wife? . . . Why had she gone, upon the following morning, straight to the tennis-court, to be felled, at once, by his missile? . . . and why, oh why, when he had held her hands in his,—during those too fleeting,—too delightful moments,—in that dim and for-ever-hallowed corner,—had she allowed him to go on clasping them thus,—and to look so earnestly into her soul with his appealing grey eyes that he must certainly have discovered her secret, and made himself for ever her master? . . .

Whilst these conflicting emotions were agitating her mind, Algy had led her into the tea-room, for it was much too crowded to think of dancing. The tea-room door was opposite to that other door,—against which she perceived, as she passed by,—with a feeling of intense relief,—it must be confessed,—that a certain tall figure was still leaning. His back was towards her, however, and he was apparently engaged in watching the dancers. Lord Belmorris, also, still occupied the same position by his side.

‘Your uncle seems to be . . . great friends with,—the “*Vet*,”’ said Lucy hesitatingly,—as she and her cousin seated themselves within sight of the two figures. She could not bring herself, *quite* yet,—to speak of him as ‘Mr. Grubbe,’—for,—Shakespeare notwithstanding,—there *is* something in a name, after all! . . . A woman’s mind, however, is, happily, so constituted, that, when she is in love, it can adapt itself to anything. Lucy Barlow had begun to realize this fact already, and knew, now, that, some day, the name of ‘Grubbe’ might sound, in her ears, even as the ‘music of the spheres;’ but this day had not quite dawned as yet! . . .

‘The “*Vet?*”’ repeated Algernon, following

the direction of her glance. ‘Yes; he and the “Vet” have always been great “pals.” They meet upon the common subject of horse-flesh. But where do you see them together now?’

‘In the doorway, there;—Lord Belmorris is talking to him. They’ve been talking together for some time. You can’t see your uncle because the “Vet” hides him,—being so tall.’

‘Being “so tall?” . . . the Vet “*tall?*” . . . Why who on earth do you take for the “Vet?”’ he rose, coffee-cup in hand, in order to see better. Then he laughed.

‘It’ll amuse Addie,’ he said; ‘I suppose then, it was the “Vet” who gave you that cut over the head?’ and he laughed again.

‘I *thought* it was the “Vet,”’ replied Lucy. ‘I heard he was playing a match with the Colonel, and he hit me because he was trying a stroke with his left hand.’

‘Then you may as well go on thinking it,’ said Algy suddenly. ‘It *was* the “Vet,” of course, and he *was* playing tennis with the Colonel, and he’s talking there, in the doorway with my uncle Belmorris!’

Lucy perceived that her cousin was intent upon some manner of mystification, and had

glimmerings of the mistake she had possibly made. The short, stumpy man, with the ferocious moustaches, was, perhaps, the 'Vet,' whilst the man who had in his keeping the keys of her secret soul, was, perhaps, the Colonel? . . At first, she did not quite know whether to feel glad or sorry. Something, it may be, of the regret experienced by Tennyson's village-maiden upon discovering that her 'landscape-painter' was, in reality, no other than 'the Lord of Burleigh,' overshadowed her heart for a moment. (We women are so fond of anything partaking of the nature of a sacrifice—an utter abasement and immolation of self!) *Then*, all was gratitude and secret rejoicing! He had *not* corresponded clandestinely with another woman! He was *not* looked upon as a subject for the jeers and scoffings of that other woman's sisters! Of all such ignoble trifling and flirting he was utterly and entirely innocent,—and—his name was not 'Grubbe!' . . .

With a youth like Algernon Binks, however, who seemed never to be either thoroughly in jest nor thoroughly in earnest, and who veiled his meaning in such ambiguous language, it would not do to make sure too soon.

'Just look!' he whispered now, 'at the way Beauty's "carrying on" with the *Colonel*! . . . I declare they're both drinking out of the same cup!' . . .

He indicated, as he spoke, a far corner of the room, where Miss Beauty was seated upon a low arm-chair, apparently deep in sentimental converse with Lucy's first partner in the valse. Algy had decidedly pronounced the word "Colonel" as though it ought to have been written with inverted commas. This was surely a confirmation of the 'Lord-of-Burleigh' theory! . . .

The music had ceased whilst they had been talking; now it had recommeneed.

'I'm afraid,' said Algy, rising, and going towards the door, 'that I'm engaged for this dance; but I'll go off and find you a partner. There's a friend of mine,—awfully rich and all that,—who's been bothering me to introduce him to you all the evening. He says you're the prettiest girl he's ever seen!'

He alluded to the well-preserved landed-proprietor,—discovered, and 'secured' upon the previous day by the three Miss Bolderos in the Frog Walk,—who had recently divorced his second wife, and who may, perhaps, have looked

to Lucy to console him for the disappointments of the past. But Lucy neither knew nor cared who was intended.

'Hadn't I better leave you with my uncle Belmorris?' said Algy when they got out into the passage.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Lucy, shrinking back again towards the tea-room. 'Let me stay where I am; I can quite take care of myself!'

Algernon took her at her word, and penetrated into the midst of the dancers.

Seeing him entering the room alone,—or hearing, perhaps, Lucy's earnest accents in the passage,—the tall figure in the doorway turned and confronted her.

She drew back towards the tea-room, whilst her heart seemed to stand still in her bosom. But he came straight towards her, and, without more ado, slipped her arm through his own.

'Let us get away from all this heat and noise,' he said, as he led her towards the moonlit colonnade. 'You mustn't thrust me aside in this dreadfully hard-hearted way,' he went on,—half-playfully,—half-reproachfully,—when they were once outside.—'You should remember that,—in the train,—you were my little wife!'

## CHAPTER XVIII.

I SUPPOSE that, as a rule, men do not count the cost of their words, or else, that they are ignorant of the importance some women attach to them. Perhaps,—educated as they are, to be pleasure-seekers from the very beginning, they may never anticipate the serious consequences of either word or deed until the consequences of both are thrust upon them against their will. They exist,—for the most part,—far more than women do,—for the *day only*, leaving the morrow altogether to Fate, and so are much less affected than we are by the pleasures and pains of either retrospection or anticipation. With but few exceptions, too, they are disinclined, by Nature, to live over again in the Present that which has once been in the Past; and indeed, the stir and turmoil of their lives generally precludes them altogether from solitary and sentimental broodings.

It is not often that a full-grown Englishman, (off the Stage,) has ever been seen to shed tears about a woman's love, and one may make pretty sure that,—as a rule,—the cheerful and well-satisfied bridegroom will be transformed into an equally cheerful and well-satisfied widower, should occasion demand.

An Englishman will bury his father, his mother, his wife,—his best friend,—with an extraordinary amount of equanimity. At the grave of his child,—perhaps, he may seem to falter,—for is not his child a part and parcel of himself? It is the *mother* of his child, however, who has foreseen this dark and terrible day from the moment when her darling was first stricken, and when her husband could only grumble at the frequent demands upon her attention, or at the extravagant charges of the doctor. She has lived, in fancy,—through the whole of this desolate time,—long before her bereavement was actually achieved,—and her eyes have grown dim and weary with weeping whilst her lord and master was peacefully and noisily slumbering. But have men, for all this,—less true affection,—less consciousness of real emotion, upon the little day for which they seem to have elected to live? . . .

When the hour of their awakening at last strikes,—and ere the sounds of the hammer have died away into silence,—may they not, perchance, experience in a more concentrated form,—the feelings which are strained by us women to reach from the Past to the Future? . . .

I have always endeavoured to believe this myself, and shall go on now trying to believe it to the end ;—and I believe, too, that the blunders and barbarities of men towards the women who love them, are often nothing more than the blunders and barbarities of ignorant children, who will pick the wings off a fly in order to make it look like a beetle, or try to improve the eyes of a mouse by filling them up with red-hot sealing-wax,—unconscious, all the while, of the horrible sufferings they inflict.

Had the hero of Lucy Barlow's imagination guessed at the effect of his words,—perhaps he might never have uttered them. Did he, or did he not,—realize the impression they were likely to produce upon her? . . . . Perhaps he had not thought about it at all, and was merely living out his day, and filling it to its fullest with pleasurable emotions, because he realized and intended that it should be a day, and *a day only*?

But, to Lucy, he appeared to be intensely in earnest. To her, one of the words he had just made use of, was as an assurance that he could not have been speaking lightly. He had alluded, only half-seriously,—it is true—to the fact that she had been taken for his wife. Surely, surely, he would never have reminded her of this had the notion appeared to him to be either absurd or altogether impossible of fulfilment? . . . Was not the name of ‘wife’ too sacred a name to be lightly uttered,—even in the sense in which he had uttered it just now? . . .

The moon, which at Hampton Court, must have looked down upon so many lovers,—royal, as well as obscure,—had arisen now in all her splendour: almost a full moon, which, it is said, makes mad people feel their madness more acutely. She seemed to have come forward into this particular quadrangle as though to examine Lucy and her companion. A sympathetic and appreciative moon,—for there is a good deal of individuality about different moons,—which seemed like a silent and sentient witness throned aloft in the sapphire firmament.

Here and there, the windows and cornerstones of the old Palace reflected her rays, and

the shadows of Lucy and her companion were cast upon the stone pavement with wonderful distinctness.

He led her out of this full moonlight down one of the side galleries, and so, on,—sauntering leisurely,—through the Fountain Court towards the passage at the foot of the Queen's Staircase, where the sound of the music reached them only in broken and fitful strains,—mingled with the gentle whispers of the fountain.

Lucy experienced a sense as of being entirely cut off, and separated from, the rest of her kind. From not only those human creatures who usually ‘lived and moved and had their being’ in her vicinity;—but from the very age and epoch in which it was her lot to exist. She and this one man,—almost a total stranger,—had wandered together into the realms of the shadowy past,—back to the times of the Tudors, the Stuarts, and the early Georges,—a period utterly done with and gone by, and, sacred, dignified, pathetic, for this very reason,—with none of the soullessness of that remoter antiquity which seems to lie almost beyond the pale of ordinary modern sympathy;—for it would have been only by the performance of an acrobatic feat, that the Emperors Vitellius and Augustus,—

set up, in their rounded niches, upon the further side of the quadrangle beyond, could have peeped into this mysterious corner.

Lucy's companion was the first to speak :—

'The moon makes one feel so insignificant,' he said ; 'so much as if one was acting a part which *she* must have seen played out so often,—it's nicer here, where we're out of her sight! . . . How many people before us,—must have wandered forth, like this,—in the moonlight, and yet to me, and, to *you* (perhaps . . . ?) how new it all seems!' . . .

He spoke sadly and tenderly. Her arm was still through his, and he held it to him as with a sense of possession. Lucy scarcely dared reply. It seemed as if some magic spell would be broken if she spoke.

'Henry the Eighth wandered here, I believe, with Anne Boleyn,' she ventured at last. She would be safe, perhaps,—if she kept exclusively to the traditions of history!

'So I read in the guide-book,' he answered, smiling ; 'and I learn, too, upon the same authority that Henry intertwined her initial "A" with his own "H" over the gateway of the Clock Tower ; but that, by the time the Banqueting Hall required

decorating, a "J" had to be substituted for the "A." Perhaps, however, I oughtn't to have told you this !'

'Why not ?'

'Because it will make you think that men are so dreadfully fickle ;—just as you are beginning life, too, and when you ought to be so full of illusions! . . . Tell me what *your* initial is ?'

'My initial is an "L,"—my name is "Lucy,"'

she answered falteringly.

He had spoken so irresponsibly about her 'beginning life,' as though,—whilst desiring that her existence should be bright and prosperous,—he himself could have no possible share in it. To her quickened senses, his words had conveyed this meaning, and they chilled her to her heart.

Suddenly, she recollected the initial 'L' which she had observed in the tennis-court tattooed upon the arm upon which she was now leaning.

'You have an "L" marked upon your arm,' she said, impelled by a sudden and irresistible impulse. 'I saw it when you were playing at tennis.'

Being so near him,—she could perceive that he started slightly. Then he answered carelessly,—

'Yes; young soldiers have a silly fashion of covering their arms with tattoo-marks. There's generally some fellow in the regiment who prides himself upon his skill in this respect, and earns an honest penny by disfiguring the whole lot of subalterns for life, and one doesn't like to deprive him of what he considers his due! . . . "L" is a graceful, lithe, entwining letter,' he went on,—as though returning from his subaltern reminiscences to the present;—'but an "L" will twist, and twine, and interlace itself, with the whole alphabet, and look always appropriate,—"*Lucy*," I think,—is different!'

'Yes; Lucy is different!' she repeated mournfully.

Something in his tone seemed to sadden and depress her. She felt that she had, perhaps, taken both him and his words too seriously.

'Yes; she is different,'—he said,—taking the little hand which nestled against his arm. 'She is utterly and entirely different from all the rest of the world,—or, so she seems to me at this moment! But in a very few years, the world will probably change her. On the surface,—at least, she will become more like other people!' He said this,—Lucy thought, almost paternally,

and again the death-chill seemed to invade her heart. . . . ‘In a very few years !’ . . . Solitary, desolate years, because that strong arm would not be there to support and comfort her ;—years that might well change her indeed ! . . .

As she mused thus, she shuddered involuntarily.

‘ You are cold,’ he said ; ‘ perhaps I ought to take you back to the ball-room ? ’

‘ Oh, no, no ! I’m not cold ! ’ she answered quickly. ‘ I was only thinking about something ! ’

‘ About the ghost ? ’ he asked ; ‘ we are just coming near to the haunted gallery. You know the story ? ’

He paused within sight of the passage leading towards the Chapel Royal. There was an oaken bench in one of the narrow arched recesses, and here they sat down,—arm in arm,—as before.

‘ It seems,’ he began, assuming a trite narrative manner, as though to conceal some sort of rising emotion, ‘ that when poor Katherine Howard fell into disgrace, she was shut up somewhere near here,—in one of the guard rooms ;—but finding out, one day, that the King was praying in chapel, she escaped from her keepers, and ran down that passage, there—in order to appeal to him. Just

as she got to the entrance of the royal pew, however, the guards seized her, and dragged her back again. Her screams were so loud that they echoed all over the Palace, but Henry,—although he heard them, went on quietly with his devotions, and now her ghost is supposed to shriek here from time to time ;—perhaps we shall hear her now ? . . .

He drew Lucy closer to him as he spoke, as though to protect her from the shrieking phantom, and they both looked towards the shadowy entrance to the Chapel Royal.

‘ It was very cruel of him ! ’ said Lucy, almost in a whisper.

‘ It was, no doubt; but in those days,—although they may have been more brutal ;—they were, at any rate, more *honest*. I fancy that when a man is thoroughly tired of a woman, almost the kindest thing he could do to her, sometimes,—would be to cut off her head ! ’

But for a quick sigh which escaped him, Lucy might have imagined that he was not speaking seriously.

‘ Is it really so ? ’ she asked in earnest tones ; ‘ but yet, if a man has never really loved, surely he can never grow tired ? ’

'He can grow tired without having really loved, and he can really love without ever growing tired, for a passing fancy does not deserve the name of *love*. Once, perhaps, in a lifetime, a man may meet with a woman of whom he knows that he can never tire, but then Fate generally contrives to tear them asunder. Could they but meet and be joined together, life would be too much like Heaven, I suppose.'

He sighed again, and then continued, as with inspiration :—

'God help the woman of whom the man she still loves has become weary! Even to *him* it must be almost pathetic to see the way she wastes her futile arts! One quarter of the same devotion if displayed by another woman would thrill his whole being with gratitude, but for *her* he has no pity. He is defended against her as with a shield and buckler; her jealousy, which in another would flatter and please him, insults and exasperates,—her silence is distracting,—her words irritate,—her tears can move him no longer. In a thousand ways *he*, too, can insult, distract, and irritate; he will seem to her to be a demon, a tyrant, an inhuman monster, and yet, perhaps, she may still love him in spite of it.

The ties which should be woven out of roses, become like iron gyves which gall and canker. When things come to such a sorry pass as this, surely it were best that one of the two should snap the links and be free !'

'I should think so,' said Lucy, deeply impressed by his earnestness ; and she then added suddenly, ' You must have been very, very tired of somebody once, to know so well what tiredness means ? '

A moment afterwards she repented of her indiscreet speech. What if he should be offended with her ? But he only continued more calmly,—

'A man who is tired of a woman is always being confronted, when in her presence, with the worst side of his own nature ; for I suppose we are selfish creatures who are never really pleasant unless we are amused. But I am speaking to a mere child of what she can never have known or imagined.'

'I can imagine what you say to be true,' returned Lucy ; ' but I hope I shall never feel it, or suffer from it. For a woman it must be hard to bear.'

'I am afraid that it is. But I have been talking to you much too seriously. Having met

with some one who seemed to me, from the first, like a friend, I have, I suppose, forgotten myself a little. I am leaving here to-morrow, however, and who can say whether we shall ever meet again? So I don't regret making the most of the fleeting moments.'

' You are going away *to-morrow!*'

A sense of desolation had swept over her spirit whilst he was speaking, and the words escaped her like a moan.

' Yes; I have to leave here to-morrow, Thursday, soon after two o'clock. I've nothing to do with the detachment here, and only came to see how they were getting on in my private capacity, and as a friend of Sparshott's. I ought to be at Hounslow now. God knows why I stayed on here!'

So he was going away! His meeting with her had been merely a chance episode in his soldier's life. She had crossed his path for a moment, and he could let her go on upon her journey by another way. Oh, for the relief of tears!

She drew away from him towards the further end of the bench, and looked out into the moonlit quadrangle.

'Are all men fickle and cruel, I wonder?' she asked, with the manner of one who is thinking aloud.

His voice changed almost to a whisper as he answered her,—

'Ah, Lucy!' he said tenderly and regretfully, 'by some strange chance we two have met,—we have *met*,—at least, and I have known you. Were it possible that you could ever have cared for me,—could I,—by a word, have made any sympathy you may have felt for me, grow up into affection, I should be a brute to say it. To go from you now is cruel,—most cruel *to myself*, but to stay might be, perhaps, cruel to *you*. We go now upon our different ways,—you will pass on, I daresay, to many new and varied experiences,—who knows but that you may twine almost as many initials as Henry the Eighth into your life and memory! But still we have met once, and I can never altogether regret it. I am glad, too, that our meeting-place happened to have been this old palace, which is not likely to be altered or pulled down, at any rate during the course of our two short lives; for in future years I shall be able to say, as I look down these desolate passages, "It was here that I knew her

first,—she leant here upon my arm, and walked with me alone in the moonlight,—it was here that I kissed her! ” ’

He drew her to him as he spoke, and pressed his lips to hers.

It was the first time that Lucy had ever known a lover’s kiss, and the lips that taught her this new lesson were the lips of the man she loved.

The sense of isolation from all other human influences seemed to endue this first embrace with something mystic and sacramental, which made it appear less like a revelation than a fulfilment. From time to time she heard, as in a dream, the gentle plashing of the fountain, and the distant strains of the music.

By-and-by, the great astronomical clock in the second quadrangle struck midnight.

Lucy tore herself from his arms at the sound, and rose from the bench.

As she did so, the bunch of fern and stenophanotis fell from her bosom.

He picked it up, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

‘ You must give me this,’ he murmured, in broken accents; ‘ something that has been yours,—to keep for all time ! ’

Then he led her out silently into the moonlight, and so,—through the Clock Court,—under the stern reproving gaze of the six Imperial Cæsars in terra-cotta, back into the ball-room.

‘I see,’ said Lord Belmorris when they reached home, and as he was helping Lucy to take off her cloak, ‘that you’ve lost the poor ‘button-hole; I pinned it in badly, and it’s fallen out. You see I’ve taken better care of *mine!*’

‘Yes; it’s lost: it’s gone!’ she answered abstractedly.

Alas! something that had been beating quite close to those fading blossoms had gone, too, to keep them company!

## CHAPTER XIX.

As this is anything but one of those complicated, sensational romances in which nearly everybody turns out to be somebody else, and wherein the reader is perpetually being thrilled by all sorts of unexpected disclosures and developments, the writer of it has not been at any pains to conceal the workings of what she may please to call the plot, and whatever bore the faintest resemblance to a mystery, must, therefore, have been immediately solved.

The handsome soldier with whom Lucy Barlow had fallen in love,—almost at first sight,—was, of course, no more a Veterinary-Surgeon than I am. The *real* Veterinary-Surgeon of the regiment—Mr. Oscar Grubbe,—was deservedly popular with all classes; for, besides being an accomplished member of his own profession, he was a first-rate tennis-player, a hard rider, and

an excellent hand with his cue. He had seen service, too, years ago, in the Crimea, where he had even been slightly wounded, and where a supposed resemblance to King Victor Emmanuel,—remarked and commented upon by some of the most distinguished of our Italian allies,—had induced him to cultivate the enormous moustaches which have already been described. Besides these, however, he possessed other points of resemblance to '*Il Rè galantuomo*,' for he had the reputation of being brave as a lion, and was known to be a devoted admirer of the fair sex.

At the railway-station at Hampton Court, Miss Binks had bowed politely to this gentleman, having become acquainted with him through her brother Algy, with whom he had sometimes played at billiards. Lucy, however, had imagined that her cousin was bowing to Colonel Hepburn,—who, at that moment, engrossed the whole of her attention, and it was in consequence of Adeliza's subsequent remark,—to the effect that she had bowed to the 'Vet,'—that the absurd misunderstanding arose.

Anthony Hepburn, who, through a combination of fortuitous circumstances, found himself, when but little over thirty, in command of the

18th Lancers,—was descended upon his father's side, from an ancient Scottish family,—the same which, some three centuries before, had given a third husband to one of the most beautiful and unfortunate of Queens, and contributed to history one of its sternest and most uncompromising personalities. His father, who had likewise entered the army, had been dead now some fourteen or fifteen years. This gentleman had married, early in life, the beautiful daughter of Lord Falconborough,—a nobleman possessed of large estates in the north of England,—and Anthony was the sole surviving offspring of this union. After the death of her father, Mrs. Hepburn had stayed continually with the brother who had succeeded him, at Falconborough Park, during the absence of her husband upon foreign service. Upon being left a widow, she took up her abode there altogether; and it was there that her death occurred, some nine or ten years before the opening of this story.

The Hepburns, however, were possessed of a good landed property in Scotland, which, at one time, had encircled a fine old manor-house with a somewhat unpronounceable name. This manor-house had been unfortunately burnt down before

Anthony's birth, and as his father had never rebuilt it, he came to regard Falconborough Park as his natural home. There was a good reason for this besides the burning of the Scotch manor-house. Lord Falconborough was childless. His marriage had turned out unhappily, and when he eventually became a widower,—upon the principle of the 'burnt child,' he did not care to make a second matrimonial venture. Mrs. Hepburn, his sister, kept house for him, and presided at his table. He was devotedly attached to her;—the place was settled upon her after her brother's death, and upon her son Anthony after her,—so that, notwithstanding his childlessness, Lord Falconborough was not without an heir-presumptive.

Mrs. Hepburn, however, pre-deceased her brother by several years,—whilst Anthony entered the army, and only revisited the scenes of his boyhood at rare intervals.

He had been fully prepared, therefore, for the possibility of his uncle's re-marriage, and had never thought much about his prospects, until Lord Falconborough's death,—which event had taken place some two years previously to the opening of this story.

Anthony Hepburn then found himself, whilst

the best years of his life were still in all human probability, before him, a rich man. The title,—of course, for want of a direct heir-male,—had become extinct,—but Falconborough Park,—with all the adjacent lordships, manors, messuages, tenements, farm lands, and hereditaments, had passed to him by right of his mother.

The new possessor of the Falconborough estates had seen a good deal of active service. He had passed the first three years of his military career in India, and was so sunburnt when he renewed his acquaintance with his uncle and his servants upon being summoned to Falconborough to his mother's death-bed, that they had scarcely recognised him.

Since this time, however, his soldiering had been fortunately confined to his native land,—for his accession, later on, to his uncle's estates, seemed to render a residence in England to a certain extent imperative. He had revisited, too, from time to time, the Scotch cradle of his race, and had gradually collected together all the pictures, furniture, and other remaining objects which had escaped the fire, and which had been housed for more than forty years by the factor of the estate. These, he had had transported

to Falconborough Park,—for his pleasantest memories were associated with what had now become his English home, and it was surmised by those persons who interested themselves in his affairs, that if he ever settled down to a married life, it was there that he would establish himself.

But, shortly after his succession to the Falconborough property, quite a romantic circumstance had come to pass.

As Colonel Hepburn, who happened to be upon a visit to his north-country home, was sitting, one afternoon, in his study, overlooking some papers connected with his new inheritance,—his soldier-servant announced that a lady and gentleman desired to speak to him upon business. They were shown at once into his presence, and the lady's first words were certainly something of a surprise.

'I have come, Anthony Hepburn,' she exclaimed, with a good deal of melodramatic gesticulation, 'to present to you a personage whose existence you have found it expedient, until now, to ignore, notwithstanding that several letters have been addressed to your solicitor upon the subject. Anthony Hepburn! —this young man is my son,—the only child of his widowed

mother! . . . He is the present Lord Falconborough,—the rightful heir to the estates which you have purloined;—the injured cousin whom you have so basely defrauded of his inheritance! ’

The lady, who was stout and apoplectic-looking,—notwithstanding some traces of past beauty, breathed hard as she concluded this speech, and sank heavily into the nearest arm-chair.

A claimant to the Falconborough peerage and estates! . . .

Anthony now remembered to have heard of this woman before, through his uncle’s solicitor, but it had never occurred to him that she would have ventured upon any claims of this kind. She had been an actress once,—an old flame of his uncle’s, and an annuity had been settled upon her by his will. Of her son, or pretended son,—no mention was made, and Anthony Hepburn could only regard the affair in the light of an attempt to extort money. Nevertheless, he preserved a polite indifference of manner, and dismissed his two visitors with a promise that he would investigate their pretensions.

This promise, with the help of the family lawyer, he had been enabled to keep. It turned out as he had expected. The lady in question

had no just pretension to be regarded as the late Lord Falconborough's wife. The young man was believed to be certainly her son,—but he was the son also,—as far as it is possible to establish such dubious relationships,—of an Italian scene-painter, who had been a favoured admirer of his mother's before her acquaintance with the late Lord Falconborough. In Lord Falconborough's lifetime, no such claims had been advanced, and the lawyer at once characterized the matter as a conspiracy with intent to defraud, and made known his views to the two conspirators. Anthony Hepburn, having left the affair in the hands of his legal adviser, dismissed it altogether from his mind. The claimants recalled themselves from time to time to his memory, by sending him letters full of threats and denunciations, but he merely enclosed them to his lawyer, and troubled himself no more about them. A good round sum, paid down, would no doubt have saved him from all further annoyance, and he felt tempted, more than once, to settle the matter by this means. He was strongly advised, however, to do nothing which might be set down to fear,—or to the desire,—upon his own part, to effect any manner of private compromise, and so he had ended by simply daring them to do their worst.

Could he have brought himself to believe that the young man claiming to have become Lord Falconborough, was in reality his uncle's child,—the fact that he was certainly illegitimate would have been no bar to Anthony Hepburn's generosity.

But the pretender in question,—although he affected to be several years younger,—was evidently very nearly as old as Anthony himself, and it was apparent, from some letters which had been discovered by the family lawyer,—that the late Lord Falconborough had not made the acquaintance of the mother until some years after his birth. The lady herself had been handsomely provided for, and Colonel Hepburn did not consider, therefore, that he was under any further obligation with respect to her;—whilst regarded merely as an object for promiscuous benevolence,—she did not seem to be deserving of his consideration.

But although he had disposed of the matter thus summarily, he knew that the man who called himself 'Lord Falconborough' bore him no good will. Nay, more ; having been thwarted in his project for extortion, his *ill-will* had become so thoroughly aroused, that it was only the un-

certainty and obscurity of his position which rendered him powerless for evil. In a word,—Anthony Hepburn had acquired an enemy,—who, should the occasion present itself, would be always ready to work him mischief.

At the time of Colonel Hepburn's meeting with Lucy Barlow, he was seriously thinking of retiring from the army. The monotony of a soldier's life in days of peace, was somewhat wearisome to a nature capable of wider sympathies and more varied interests than could be ministered to satisfactorily in barracks. He had a taste for art, for literature, for sport, for foreign travel, and he was not unmindful, either, of the responsibilities involved in the possession of a large estate. He did not, therefore, require to continue with his soldiering for the sake of a distraction, and he was too well off to be at all influenced by the question of pay.

During the time that a detachment of his regiment was occupying the barracks at Hampton Court, he had more than once visited the Palace. He had never remained there, however, for more than one night at a time, and probably, upon the day when he first fell in with Lucy, he might have proceeded directly to Hounslow but for the

accident which had placed the barrack-room usually occupied by the Captain in command at his disposal.

The ladies at the Palace had not taken these flying visits as complimentary to themselves. They regarded Colonel Hepburn as somewhat reserved and eccentric,—‘not half such good fun’ as most of his predecessors,—and he had only been presented,—amongst their number, to the three Miss Bolderos, who always contrived to scrape an acquaintance with anything in the similitude of man.

Adeliza Binks, therefore, although she had seen and admired the haughty Colonel at a distance, was only introduced to him at the Boldero dance. Her uncle, Lord Belmorris, had charged himself with this first duty of a conscientious chaperon, and he had sauntered with her through the figures of a quadrille.

Belmorris Castle was not far from Falconborough Park, and notwithstanding some nine or ten years’ difference in their respective ages, Anthony Hepburn and the sporting nobleman had known each other well in the past, whilst Adeliza Binks,—although she had never happened to fall in with him during any of

her visits to the North, was perfectly familiar with Colonel Hepburn's name, and had informed herself of a good many facts connected with his family history. So much for the antecedents of the man who seemed likely to exercise some kind of influence over Lucy Barlow's future. It may be as well, perhaps, to see whether his enemy and pretended cousin bore him any resemblance.

'Family likeness,' (says George Eliot,) 'has often a deep sadness in it. Nature,—that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains;—blends yearnings and repulsions, and ties us by our heart-strings to the beings that jar us at every movement.'

Had the young man who,—when moving in circles wherein it was unlikely that the imposture would be discovered,—insisted upon styling himself Lord Falconborough,—relied, for the acknowledgment of his pretensions, upon his resemblance to any of the Falconborough family, his claims would have been dismissed at a first glance.

By 'bone' and by 'muscle,'—as well as by the 'subtler web' of his brains,—he seemed to be utterly divided from every member of it. His 'yearnings and repulsions' were altogether dif-

ferent from those of Anthony Hepburn, and save for those jarrings, at every movement, which occur too frequently amongst close kinsfolk, no evidences of consanguinity would have stood revealed had the two men ever enjoyed an opportunity for mutual scrutiny.

Falconborough,—as I may as well call him for want of another name,—was anything but reserved in manner. Words came easily to him, and his apparent frankness had the effect of prepossessing new acquaintances in his favour, by impressing them with the notion that one knew, as it were, the worst of him at once. He pretended to no virtues, but had the good sense to conceal his vices; whilst, without being well educated in the higher meaning of the term, he was decidedly accomplished.

From the theatrical scene-painter,—a son of the Land of Song,—he had inherited a tenor voice of exceeding sweetness, and a remarkable facility with his pencil. He was possessed, too, of a very un-British gift of tongues,—most modern languages seeming to come to him quite naturally,—without any necessity for the irksome studying of grammars.

With all these endowments,—united as they

were, to a handsome person,—Falconborough might easily have made his way in the world without relying upon others for assistance. Unfortunately for himself, however,—besides being a born gambler,—he had a craving for expensive pleasures, and the '*dolce far niente*' spirit of his race apparently neutralised every attempt at serious application. On the whole, however,—thanks to the finite nature of his aspirations, and taking into consideration the small amount of effort which he expended in bringing about their realisation, he had a right to congratulate himself, in some respects, upon his good fortune. His title and estates, (according to his own account of the matter), had been kept from him,—it is true,—but, in spite of this,—over those persons who were unacquainted with the ramifications of the Peerage, he was enabled to lord it to his heart's content; and, indeed, it almost seemed as if he had ended by persuading himself of the justice of his own claims. He had coquetted with the muses,—dabbled in amateur stockbroking,—composed an opera, and had talked quite seriously of going upon the stage. In the Bohemian, and not over-fastidious, circles, wherein, for the most part, he

was in the habit of moving,—‘Lord’ Falconborough’s artistic leanings were treated with tenderness and respect. It was thought to be quite natural that, when it came to the point, the young nobleman should shrink from all the drudgery entailed by the adoption of any particular profession, and his failures, when they came, were always borne by him with so much careless good-humour, that they gained him almost as much sympathy as a success. Those amongst his associates who may have suspected that there existed some sort of hitch with regard to his peerage, had never seemed in the least inclined to look upon him in the light of an impostor. One day,—(he would explain, with an airy wave of the hand,)—all these family-complications would be satisfactorily arranged. He could settle the affair at once, were he to harden his heart and plunge into a lawsuit, but a natural delicacy deterred him from attacking those who were so near of kin:—he looked upon this remedy in the light of a last resource:—other, and more friendly, means, ought first of all to be employed,—but the whole thing was merely a question of time. . . .

His mother,—during her lifetime,—had been

enabled to supply him pretty liberally with money,—for she had possessed other friends almost as generous as the late Lord Falconborough,—and this had enabled him to cut a distinguished figure amongst the artists and city-folk with whom he associated, and who were quite willing,—in order to secure the society of one so agreeable and accomplished,—to overlook any flaw which might possibly exist in his title.

But his mother had died,—quite unexpectedly, some time before the period at which this story opens,—and with her, the income which he had assisted her so willingly to dispel. With the usual improvidence of her class, she had set aside nothing.—Falconborough, therefore, had been existing for more than a year entirely upon his own resources.

In appearance, Anthony Hepburn's pretended cousin was dark, pale, and slight;—below,—rather than above the middle height, but active and graceful as a panther. His brown eyes were dreamy and melancholy, and his voice,—in speaking as well as in singing,—extremely melodious. Underneath a cloak of habitual carelessness and good-nature, there seemed to his admirers,—both male and female,—*(and the latter predominated)*

in a large proportion,)—to lurk something romantic,—melodramatic,—Byronic,—which could not fail to invest him with a peculiar charm. It was remarked, also, that scarcely anything appeared to be capable of affecting his serenity, and that love, loss, and disappointment alike, seemed to glide conveniently from the tablets of his memory like water off a duck's back.

So much indifference to the ordinary events of every day, might have augured, perhaps, the existence of some secret interest of an absorbing kind; but this view of the matter was not taken by any of his friends and associates. They regarded it, rather, as one of the evidences of his nobility,—as a sign that he was in some measure beyond the reach of the petty worries and vexations wherewith they, themselves, were tormented; —a sort of repose of '*Vere de Vere*', which was one of the most unmistakable characteristics of 'long descent.'

And, after all, it was not wonderful that these people,—ignorant as they were of Falconborough's strange antecedents,—should miss the clue to his apparent indifference to those matters in which they were interested themselves.

Had they desired, however, to see their languid

lordling animated, indignant, impassioned,—his thin nostrils distended,—his soft eyes flashing forth hate and defiance,—they would only have had to whisper in his ear the name of Colonel Anthony Hepburn of the 18th Lancers;—but this, of course, it was not likely that they could know.

## CHAPTER XX.

IT was not likely that Lucy Barlow, being young, impressionable, and, by this time, hopelessly in love,—would have been able to obtain much sleep when she retired to her chamber after the Miss Bolderos' dance. She remained for some time at her open window, framed by the climbing tendrils of the blush-roses,—gazing pensively at the silvery river over which that same sympathetic moon was still shining.

It was nearly half-past one o'clock, and, notwithstanding the brightness of the moonlight, all was silent, save when the footfall of some belated wayfarer echoed from the towing-path to the left of her window.

A soldier had strolled along it,—just now,—with his sweetheart. A soldier of *his* regiment, and invested, therefore, with an especial interest. He had stepped up to the little iron gateway

which separated the outer Palace-yard from the river-side, and had rattled at its handle ;—‘Locked out, by Jove !’ she heard him murmur, and he passed on down the towing-path with his companion.

The expression was not particularly poetical ; but to-night everything seemed poetical to Lucy.

Happy, happy girl ! (she mused ingenuously,) —wandering, thus, with her chosen lover, by the side of the beautiful river, with the gentle moon gazing down at her from the starry firmament, and casting over everything a glamour of enchantment ! . . .

Perhaps, to this simple maiden, her soldier-lad seemed almost as great a hero as did one of his superior officers to *another maiden*,—seated, —not a thousand miles away,—at her lonely bower, overlooking that same moonshiny river !

Lucy watched the two figures until they became merged in shadow, and sighed a quick sigh,—as of regretful yearning.

From the little strip of garden below, there arose the perfume of roses,—of mignonette,—of carnations ;—a mingling of delicious odours. She turned from the river and gazed wistfully across the outer court to where she could see, upon her

right, the long low line of the cavalry-barracks. There, too, all was silence. At no one of the many windows could she perceive a light. All those magnificent warriors, with the exception of the sentries, and of the young man who had been locked out, were doubtless, lying, wrapped in profound slumber. . . . And was *he*, too, asleep? . . . Probably,—because she had always heard that men were quite different from women. It was not likely that the memories of that evening would be powerful enough to keep *a man* awake! . . . He was sleeping in barracks to-night,— (this much she had ascertained,—indirectly,—of course,) occupying Captain Sparshott's quarters, who,—in consequence of his accident, had gone home upon sick-leave,—leaving the command to the young subaltern to whom Adeliza had alluded as ‘little Pycroft;’—and it almost seemed to Lucy as if she could penetrate through the brick-work, and behold the room wherein he lay,—with its simple Spartan appointments, and the martial accoutrements dangling from door and bed-post. She knew exactly what his aspect was when he was asleep, because she had seen him sleeping in the train, and looking, as she thought at the time, just as one might imagine a knight upon a tomb-

stone. . . . ‘Upon a tombstone!’ . . . Away with the ghastly and terrible comparison! . . . Must *he*, too, then, some day, die—this noble creation in God’s image,—and lie cold and forsaken in some dark church-vault, for whose dear head no silken pillow could be too soft,—no gentle lady’s arms too tender? . . .

She turned from the window with tears in her eyes, and commenced absently undressing.

As she unhooked the front of her white dress, a roll of bluish writing-paper fell on to the floor. It was the half-sheet of a letter which Lord Belmorris had wrapped round the wire-mounted stalks of his ‘button-hole’ in order that they might not scratch her, and it was covered with bold, manly, characters, which seemed, somehow, to be familiar.

Thinking that, if it had contained anything of a private nature, Lord Belmorris would not have parted with it, and that she was, therefore, at liberty to examine it, she spread it out abstractedly, upon her pin-cushion, and read as follows:—

‘MY DEAR LORD,

‘Being in town yesterday, on business of my own, I ran round to your place, according to

your wishes, and paid a visit to Miss Marchmont. I found her in, as she was in too bad a way to go out. I had her stripped, and took a good look at her. My opinion is, that there is internal inflammation which goes against her improving,—as well as the injury to her jaw, which is now all on one side, and seriously interferes with her enjoying her meals. Her tongue, too, is much swollen, and hangs some way out of her mouth, and my candid opinion is, that your Lordship will never derive any further satisfaction from the possession of her. She has been blistered as well as physicked, and all done for her that can be done, and I agree with you that it will be advisable to have her immediately destroyed.

‘I am, my dear Lord,  
‘Yours faithfully and obediently,  
‘OSCAR GRUBBE.’

‘To the Right Honble.

‘The Earl of Belmorris, &c., &c.’

To what erroneous conclusions might not Lucy have arrived, derogatory alike to Lord Belmorris's humanity and to his morals,—if she had not read in Lady Mabella's letter of invitation that ‘Miss Marchmont’ was the name of

'the celebrated mare, who but for a lamentable accident would certainly have won the Oaks!'

This letter, however, whilst it gave rise to no unpleasant misunderstandings, reassured Lucy upon a subject about which she may still have experienced some lingering doubts. It was in precisely the same handwriting as the note she had taken from the tennis-court boy in Beauty Boldero's cupboard;—the same rampant, wriggling creature, which she had mistaken for a serpent,—was emblazoned upon the paper:—there could be no further question about the matter! This was, no doubt, the 'communication' to Lord Belmorris alluded to by the real 'Vet' during the pauses of the valse; and it was for this absurd-looking little man that the youngest of the three Miss Bolderos had, *faute de mieux*, 'got up,' (as her eldest sister had declared,) 'quite a furious flirtation!' . . . . But it was fortunate, on the whole, that everybody had not exactly the same taste! . . . .

After showering blessings upon her hero,—lying, as she imagined him,—in all the dignity of placid repose,—Lucy repaired to her little white bed,—to 'assume,' (at any rate,)—Lady Mabella's favourite 'recumbent position,' but, of course, not *to sleep!*

What restless, interminable hours before the morning actually dawned ! and yet, the east was beginning to grow rosy long before she had thought of going to bed! . . .

Without waiting for the housemaid to call her, she arose, and seated herself again at the window. The sunshine was almost blinding at first, and the river was alive with boats, barges, and outriggers. The barracks, too, presented their usual animated appearance. The troopers had already returned from watering their horses,—just as she drew aside her curtain they came clattering into the barrack-yard.

What a contrast to the drowsy stillness of the previous night ! . . .

Perhaps,—she thought,—if only she remained long enough at her window, she might behold *him* just once again. *Afterwards*,—when he was utterly gone from her,—she would not like to think that she had missed even this melancholy satisfaction when it might have been within her reach, and it would be no use dressing too soon, as Adeliza was sure to be late after the dissipation of the night before.

At about half-past eight o'clock Lucy met with her reward. She perceived Colonel Hepburn

crossing the barrack-yard, clad in a suit of boating-flannels, and carrying a dark yachting-jacket.

(Why, oh, why, did he seem more beautiful in every different costume?)

He sauntered on until he came close under the railing of the garden, and she could hear his footsteps passing quite near to her. She drew back into the curtain overwhelmed by emotion, and at that moment the housemaid knocked at the door.

When Lucy looked out again she saw that he had gone out through the small iron gateway which had been tried by the soldier on the previous night, and was making his way towards the boats. Evidently he was going for a morning row.

It now occurred to her that if she could only dress whilst he was on the river, she might go outside and await her cousin under the lilac-bush beneath the window, where she had noticed that there were some garden-chairs, and in this way, perhaps, catch a furtive glimpse of him through the railings, as he came back;—for he would probably return by the way he went, instead of going round to the further gates.

As soon as she was dressed, and after a last look to see that he was not already in sight, she tapped gently at the door of Addie's room. As she had anticipated, her cousin was still in bed. She was awake, however, and seriously thinking of getting up, only, she was so dreadfully sleepy, and could not imagine what possessed Lucy to be stirring so early.

'Mama won't be down for hours,' she said, yawning; 'she'll take advantage, thinking we're sure to be late, and so will Guffy. I didn't mean to get up till eleven!'

'Then I shall wait for you in the garden,' said Lucy, 'and please don't hurry on my account; I shall be quite happy sitting under the trees!'

She went out, through the dining-room window, into the narrow strip of private garden where she had seen a group of chairs upon the previous day. They were no longer there, however, and she found that they had been moved outside the railings to a shady spot under a large elm-tree overlooking the river, probably by Algy and Lord Belmorris when they had indulged in their after-dinner smoke. As she was dragging one of them back into the garden, Colonel Hepburn came quickly up the steps

leading from the towing-path to the iron gateway.

The garden-chair escaped from her hold, she felt too overpowered by emotion to utter a word.

He came towards her, and, also without speaking, took her hand and led her towards the chairs. She sank into one of them, and he was about to follow her example, when he uttered an exclamation :—

‘ Ah ! . . . Sergeant-Major Willis ! . . . Good morning to you ! ’

Lucy glanced up quickly, with a mingled sense of relief and disappointment, and perceived a very magnificent-looking personage standing bolt upright before her. To her inexperienced eye, he appeared less like a sergeant than a field-marshall, although he wore only an undress uniform.

Some portion of the mysterious electric, or mesmeric current, which seemed always to influence Lucy when in Colonel Hepburn’s presence, seemed now to have become diverted by Troop-Sergeant-Major Willis (for it appeared that this was his proper style).

The colour began to return to her cheeks, and she breathed more freely.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said the Troop-Sergeant; 'might I ask when we may expect to see Captain Sparshott? . . . Rather a heavy list of complaints for him, sorry to say, sir!'

'I hope to see him this evening in London,' answered the Colonel. 'I'll find out his plans, and send you over some one from Hounslow if he's likely to be laid up much longer. There's nothing serious, I hope?'

'Usual charges, sir, but a full sheet. Captain'll be disappointed, sir, in Private Pretyman, as I was myself. Locked out, last night, and I'm sorry to say, sir . . .'

The Sergeant-Major lowered his voice, and hesitated.

'Ah! a lady in the case!' said the Colonel, as though to anticipate what he might be about to put into cruder language.

'Well, no, sir, not exactly a "*lady*." . . .

'A "*woman*," then,' returned Colonel Hepburn, smiling, and he then added, in an undertone, turning to Lucy,—

'You see how your sex seem always bent upon luring us on to destruction!'

'Beg pardon, sir, but I don't think I should quite say a "*woman*," sir,' suggested the Sergeant-

Major, respectfully ; ‘first offence, sir, so I don’t think we must be *too* hard upon him : I think it would be as well to enter it as “*a young female*,” sir !’

‘All right ! As you say, we mustn’t be *too* hard upon him !’ and he glaneed towards Lucy with a look which seemed to say, as though in extenuation of the soldier’s misconduct :—

‘. . . . we too, have played,  
We, likewise, in that subtle shade  
We too, have twisted in our hair  
Such tendrils as the wild Loves wear !’

‘A “young female,”’ he remarked, when Sergeant-Major Willis had saluted and departed, ‘seems, in the regiment, to describe some sort of central grade, not quite so high up as a “lady,” nor altogether so low down as a “woman.”’

They were alone together once more. Lucy glanced at his face with a look of appealing scrutiny, seeking there for some trace of his more earnest mood.

As her eyes wandered, she perceived in his button-hole, her *bouquet* of the previous night, which had been given to her by Lord Belmorris just as she was starting for the Bolderos’ dance. The stephanotis was brown and faded, and the

maiden-hair fern had lost all its feathery verdure, but he was wearing it still, close, quite close, to his heart! . . . With all his seeming indifference of manner, then, he was not utterly and entirely without feeling! . . .

He perceived that she had noticed the flowers. Their eyes met for a moment, but their lips were silent. The grey eyes said, quite plainly, to the brown,—

‘Perhaps I may not wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at, but I’m not *quite* made of adamant for all that! . . . I can love, I can feel, I can remember; are you not, sometimes, just a little hard upon me? . . .’

Whereupon the timid brown eyes seemed to answer them back,—

‘Forgive me! Forgive me! . . . I see that I have judged you too harshly; but I am a poor, ignorant, distraught creature, about whose path all sorts of strange waves of emotion seem to be raging and surging! . . . I am rudderless, anchorless; I have neither aim nor purpose; I float like the thistle-down before your breath! But I know that you have become my master, and that I love you, and bless you, and thank you for wearing those withered blossoms!’ . . .

There was a footfall upon the gravel path, and Lord Belmorris came towards them from the house. He was accompanied by his toothpick, and carried the morning papers under his arm.

'Up early, Miss Lucy!' he said, as he shook hands. 'Good morning, Anthony! . . . Off to-day, I hear? So "'Appy 'Ampton" is over!'

He seated himself upon a vacant chair to Lucy's left, and unfolded a newspaper. By-and-by he looked across her towards Anthony Hepburn, and she saw that his eyes became riveted, with rather a perplexed expression, upon the mummified remains of his own magnificent 'button-hole' upon the Colonel's breast.

He wished her to perceive that he had observed it, no doubt, for he coughed in a marked manner, as if to attract her attention, and then glanced down at the flap of his own coat.

*He*, likewise, she now saw, was wearing, as it were, her colours! The rose-bud he had picked up from the floor when her bunch had fallen from her dress, limp and disconsolate in appearance, was now in his button-hole! . . . The sense as of being utterly rudderless and irresponsible, whilst winds and whirlpools were encompassing her

round upon every side, grew stronger and stronger in Lucy's bewildered mind. It seemed to her, that, by no direct act of her own had she striven to bring about such a misleading state of affairs, and yet, what would she, herself, have thought of any other girl whom she might have surprised in a like situation? . . . Seated, complacently, as it might seem, upon an iron chair, between two men whose respective button-holes were each of them decorated with what must appear like the evidences of her preference? . . . Ah! she saw, now, how very unjust one might sometimes be to others, if one permitted oneself to judge entirely by appearances! . . .

'I say! *Do* just look at Lucy Barlow!' whispered young Algernon Binks to his sister. He had gone into her bedroom in order to hurry her, and had sauntered to the window whilst she was arranging her hair; 'seated coolly under the trees, there, between her two admirers!'

'I can't get up now,' returned Adeliza. 'I'm quite late enough as it is! . . . I think Mama's been nicely mistaken in her, and I'm sure I'm very glad of it. I think she's one of the most outrageous flirts I ever met!'

'I think so, too,' said Algernon, beginning to

whistle ; ‘ but if she is, so much the better ! . . I’m sure *I* shan’t complain ! ’

‘ Nor I, either,’ replied Addie. ‘ I hate and abominate those sneaking, slow girls, without any “ go ” in them ; they’re very nearly always so horribly sly ! ’

‘ She’s got plenty of “ go ” in her, I can tell you ! ’ remarked Algy, wagging his beardless chin ; ‘ and I think you’ll see, before long, that she’ll show us some fun ! *I* like a girl that’s got “ go ! ” ’

Lucy, in the meantime, was fully realising the truth of the time-honoured adage to the effect that although *two* may be ‘ company,’ *three* is about the most unsociable number that there can possibly be.

Lord Belmorris presented quite the appearance of having taken up his position for the day. A little furrow, own brother to that which might be so often perceived on Lady Mabella’s forehead, was traceable upon his brow, and his white teeth were clenched firmly upon his toothpick. He and his iron chair seemed as much part of one another as the body and hind-quarters of a Centaur. Lucy experienced a feeling of intense discomfort and restraint. It would have been the greatest relief

to her, at that moment, if Troop-Sergeant-Major Willis had returned to them with fresh complaints of insubordination.

By-and-by Colonel Hepburn sighed and rose from his place.

'He is going ! He is going !' she thought in her heart; 'and I may never, never, see his face again! . . . .'

She looked in an agony of mute appeal, for in such moments every feature is expressive, at the rooted figure with the toothpick, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and showed no sign whatever of stirring.

Lucy almost regretted, now, that she had fallen in with Colonel Hepburn at all upon this last morning. She would have desired that her final parting with him should have been private, sacred, screened from all other eyes. As a last memory whereupon to dwell in her after-loneliness, she would greatly have preferred those hallowed moments near to the Haunted Gallery, with their passionate heart-beats, and only the silent moon for a witness. It seemed a miserable, prosaic, disappointing thing, to part, like this, in public.

'Good-bye,' said Colonel Hepburn. He was

standing before her now, holding out his hand.

'Good-bye,' she faltered, rising from her chair.

Because of Lord Belmorris,—no doubt, he only clasped her hand for a second.

'Ta, ta!' murmured the laconic nobleman,—'see you down home soon?'

'Not yet,—unless for a day or two,' answered the Colonel,—'perhaps about Christmas.'

He shook hands with his country neighbour, and walked across the outer court back to the barracks.

He was gone from her,—perhaps for ever! . . . Oh, miserable moment of restraint and desolation! . . .

'Nice fellow, Hepburn,' Lord Belmorris remarked as soon as the Colonel's tall figure had disappeared.

He was scrutinizing her face attentively from under his marked eyebrows. Lucy found his gaze distressingly penetrating.

'Yes; very nice,' she answered mechanically.

'Good-looking, too?'

'Yes; very good-looking,' she repeated, as one in a dream.

'And well off;—fine place,—deer park,—capital shooting.' . . .

'Is he? . . . Has he?' . . . was all she was able to reply to these statements, for she felt oppressed with misery.

'Pity he isn't a marrying man!' his lordship concluded, with a sudden jerk of his tookpick.  
'We might have hooked him for Addie!'

'I . . . I think,' faltered Lucy,—afraid lest she might display her emotion by some outward and visible sign, 'that I had better go in and see if Addie is ready.'

'Not going indoors this fine morning!' cried Lord Belmorris, protesting; 'and just as I'm off to London! We've got lots to settle and talk over;—all about those donkey races, and that "pony"!'

'I think I had better go in,' she repeated; 'I haven't had any breakfast yet.'

Miserable, material, transparent, subterfuge! . . . When would she ever desire to eat any breakfast again? . . . It seemed, however, to have produced the desired effect.

'Not had your breakfast yet!' he repeated with concern. 'No wonder you look a little shaky! Come in, and we'll feed you up!'

This was not quite what she had intended !

They walked together, however, towards the house.

Once there, she might contrive to escape to her own room.

As they passed in through the dining-room window, they saw that the breakfast-table had been cleared. It had only been spread, as yet, with Lord Belmorris's breakfast, Miss Binks having said that she would ring for hers when she came down, and she had not appeared as yet. Lucy perceived her opportunity, and ran upstairs upon pretence of looking after her cousin. As Lord Belmorris was watching her from the entrance-hall, she felt bound to go actually to the door of Adeliza's room, which was situated just at the top of the stairs.

Miss Binks was still seated at her dressing-table, engaged with her luxuriant tresses ; for, like the sister of the first wife of the poet Shelley,—she seemed to have quite an inordinate liking for brushing her hair. She begged, however, that Lucy would by no means wait for her,—but that she would ring the bell and begin her breakfast at once. Perceiving, upon quitting her cousin's apartment,—that Lord Belmorris was no

longer at his post of observation, Lucy was enabled to beat a hasty retreat to her own room. But it seemed as if it was fated that she should nowhere obtain the seclusion for which she longed.

An Englishwoman's bedroom should be her castle; but how protect that castle from the inroads of the inevitable housemaid? . . . The housemaid, then, or rather the housemaids,—for there were two of them,—were already at work in Lucy's room, which was encumbered by many of the fell accessories of their calling. They were engaged,—as she entered, upon her poor little inoffensive white bed, which they were belabouring for all the world as though it had offered them some personal affront. The room was filled with minute particles of floating dust. The looking-glass was covered over with a towel. The jug was lying sideways in the bath. The water-bottle was in the washing-basin turned upside down:—in a word, all was horrid confusion, and Lucy saw that she could not have remained there in peace.

She went downstairs again, therefore, and rang the bell, as Adeliza had begged her to do, for breakfast.

Lord Belmorris,—in the meanwhile, had employed the few moments that remained to him,—for he was leaving Hampton Court for London by the 11.15 train,—in bidding farewell to his sister. Lady Mabella had been up,—she said,—and even *down*,—but she was now reposing after the fatigues from which she had escaped, and had reassumed ‘the recumbent position’ in her private sitting-room.

‘You must all run down home,’ he said, ‘in November, and help me through with some fellows that I’ve got coming to shoot the pheasants.’

‘Thank you, dearest Gussy !’ she answered, gratefully and humbly; ‘we shall be delighted, I’m sure !’

He embraced his sister, and made as though he was about to leave the room. He turned, however, before he got to the door :—

‘And I say, Mabel,’ he said, ‘you must bring down the bay filly, you know ! We’ll put her through her paces !’

‘Thank you, dearest Gussy !’ she made answer once more; ‘she will be delighted, I’m sure !’

Lady Mabella was accustomed to her brother’s peculiar phraseology, and knew at once that by ‘the bay filly’ he meant Lucy. As I have before

remarked,—to Lady Mabella Binks, her brother's wish was law.

\* \* \* \* \*

'What do they mean, Algy,' Lucy asked,—later on in the same day,—finding herself alone for a few minutes with her male cousin,—'when they say of a person that he "*isn't a marrying man*" ?'

'It means one of two things, my dear,' returned Algernon Binks, who was seldom at a loss for an answer;—'it means either that he positively can't bear the sight of women at all,—hates and abominates the whole lot, and wishes every one of them at the bottom of the Red Sea;—or else, that he's so awfully taken up with *one particular woman* that he hasn't time to think about marrying any of the others. That's about the English of it!'

Certainly Colonel Hepburn's manner towards her had not impressed her with the notion that he had wished her 'at the bottom of the Red Sea!'

## CHAPTER XXI.

It was towards the middle of the month of November,—early in the afternoon of a grey and rather melancholy-looking day.

Lucy Barlow was seated in an ancient throne-like chair in the banqueting-hall at Belmorris Castle, gazing into the fire which glowed in an enormous grate between two heraldic chimney-dogs. All her surroundings were stately,—feudal,—imposing.

The lofty walls of the apartment were of dark-coloured oak,—panelled at regular intervals with full-length family portraits in ruffs and farthingales. Between the pictures,—shields, lances, and battle-axes were arranged in patterns. The floor was of stone,—worn into uneven dents and pathways by the passing to and fro of many feet,—with Oriental rugs flung down here and there to give an air of modern comfort.

Lucy was dressed as though for an afternoon gallop,—in a neatly-fitting riding-habit;—and was absently drawing patterns in the ashes with her whip.

At her feet, upon a low wickerwork chair, was seated Algernon Binks. His fair hair was roughed up unbecomingly, and he looked flushed and excited. No doubt when he grew older, he might become handsome, as his features were good, and he was considerably above the middle height, but he did not look handsome now.

'I say, Lucy,' he exclaimed earnestly, as he propelled himself towards her upon his wicker chair; '*Do* think over seriously what I spoke to you about the other day! . . . It's not so impossible, really, my dear, as you seem to think!' . . .

'Oh, Algy!' cried Lucy impatiently; 'you know I told you that you oughtn't to talk such nonsense! How you would repent in a few years if I was silly, or wicked, enough, to encourage you! Why, you're younger than *I* am and I was only twenty last September! Men, very often, don't marry till they're over forty.'

'That's a thing that'll improve soon enough!' returned Algy, as he smoothed the down upon his

upper lip. ‘Surely you’d rather have a young husband than an old one?’

‘I’m not thinking of a husband at all. I consider that *I*,—as well as you,—am much too young to marry, and, besides, we shouldn’t have any money:—we should have to go to the workhouse!’

‘Oh, lots of people get married, now, upon nothing at all!’ replied Algy, carelessly. ‘You see, when I pass for the army, I shall have my pay;—and, just at first, we could live a good deal upon our relations. That old aunt of yours, I should think, would “cut-up” well;—rather a tight-fisted old lady,—as far as I remember,—never tipped me, I recollect, when I was a youngster. And, afterwards, we might take a tiny, tiny little house,—somewhere in Ebury Street,—or South Kensington,—and we’d buy everything at the Co-operative Stores, and only keep maid-servants,—and we’d have a bicycle instead of a brougham,—or one of those double, newfangled things,’—he added tenderly,—‘upon which we could *both* go,—you know,—and we’d write all our letters upon halfpenny post-cards! And then, as to *the future*,—why; when my Uncle Belmorris dies. . . .’

He paused abruptly, hearing a brisk footstep

approaching, and the nobleman in question,—neatly equipped for riding,—came through the *portière* at the further end of the hall,—looking as though he was in no hurry to gratify the expectations of his heirs.

‘What? ready in time?’ he exclaimed upon perceiving Lucy. ‘You’re certainly a wonderful woman! Feel equal to riding “Mustard”?’

‘Mustard’ was one of Lord Belmorris’s many hunters, and was pronounced by everyone of his many grooms to be as quiet as a lamb. He had never carried a lady, however, but had been going through a careful training to this end,—with a horsecloth flapping against his left side; and was now reported to be ‘perfectly safe.’

Ever since Lucy Barlow had been at Belmorris,—and she and her relations,—the Binkses had been staying there, now, for nearly three weeks,—its noble owner had spared no pains in order to initiate her to nearly every manner of field-sport. At his particular request, she had provided herself with a riding-habit,—Adeliza having supplied her with the address of a fashionable tailor, and after giving her a few private lessons in equitation,—at which she had proved herself an apt and willing pupil,—his lordship

had escorted her, in turn with his niece, to most of the near meets of foxhounds,—providing, most considerately, a carriage in which she could return in safety upon the days on which he himself continued to follow the hounds.

Notwithstanding that she was,—as yet,—a mere novice in horsemanship, Lucy possessed (so Lord Belmorris informed her) a most excellent ‘seat,’—perhaps from the fact that she was naturally graceful,—and she was, likewise, extremely intrepid,—possibly from her ignorance of the many dangers which may attend inexperienced riding.

She found the exercise itself perfectly delightful. It was quite a revelation to her to feel the springy movement of the hunter beneath her, as she galloped through the fresh wintry air accompanied by her kind and attentive ‘caretaker.’ What a different sensation to that of riding a donkey! . . . She had made her first acquaintance with shooting, too, although about this sport she could feel but little enthusiasm. Adeliza, to whom these things were not new, had walked out with the sportsmen during the large shooting-party of the previous week,—which had now dispersed,—and had chronicled the number

of innocent creatures slaughtered by her uncle, with the aid of a little instrument having hands something like a watch. But, when it had come to Lucy's turn to perform the same service, (which she did at Lord Belmorris's particular request,) she had felt nervous and miserable during the whole time. The noise of the guns,—going off so close to her ears,—alarmed her dreadfully,—she pitied the pheasants too much to be able to admire the most accomplished shots,—whilst the screams of the poor hares,—crying out,—as they did,—just like babies, positively made her heart bleed. Altogether, she was not sorry when the 'big shoots' came to an end. Algernon Binks went out occasionally with his uncle in the early morning,—when game was required for the house, and 'potted about,'—as he termed it,—in the near woods, but Lucy's disagreeable duties as assistant-marker were now over.

Upon leaving the house,—on the day about which I am writing,—Lucy and her cavalier proceeded through the park, and then, by lanes and devious ways, until they reached the open country beyond. This, for the most part, was wild, grand, and rather desolate-looking,—compared,—at any rate,—to the suburban scenery to which Lucy

had been accustomed. Vast moorland tracts, stretching apparently for miles, met the eye upon every side. Here and there, they passed through fields of plough and pasture,—much larger than any fields that Lucy had ever seen,—or they skirted a dark mass of forest and underwood, which, by its enclosing fence, seemed to indicate the park of some local magnate. Strange unfamiliar birds,—plovers, waterfowl, and, now and again, a long-legged heron with huge flapping wings, flew across their path, and up into the grey heavens, startled by the tread of the horses. They passed but few cottages,—cheerless and comfortless dwellings to look at, (so Lucy thought,) without either gardens or orchards,—about which hard-featured women were squatting,—for the most part unoccupied,—gazing out at the wild landscape from under their beetle brows. Some few of these curtseyed rather surlily, as the riders went by, but the majority took no notice of them.

‘We’re rather a rough set about here,’ Lord Belmorris explained; ‘but we speak the truth, and hate all shams and “bunkum.” Kick our wives to death, and that kind of thing, when they deserve it, but we’re not ashamed to confess

to it afterwards, and we "swing" for it like men. Not a bad lot, take 'em as a whole!'

'It must be nice to feel that everybody speaks the truth, though I'm afraid that wouldn't make one forgive being kicked to death,' replied Lucy, smiling.

'I think,' Lord Belmorris went on, 'without any humbug, that, in these parts, we've stronger likings and hatings than other people. It's not worth while liking everybody one comes across, or hating them either, and it takes us some time making up our minds as to whether a thing's "chalk" or first-rate. But once they're made up, they're made up for good, and I don't believe that Eton or Harrow, or the army or the navy,—or all the women in the world,—white, black, or copper-coloured,—could ever make a North-countryman quite like a Southerner, for we're a peculiar people, and just as obstinate as the Devil!'

The ostensible object of this particular ride had been to fall in with the fox-hunters. The nearest meet had been too far off for either of the young ladies to go to, but Lord Belmorris had made nearly sure that the hounds would draw towards the direction in which they were

going, in which case he and Lucy might have followed them for a little while ‘with their heads’—as he expressed it,—‘towards their own stable.’

They had seen no trace of them, however, so, as they were some way from home, and as it became dark, now, pretty early in the afternoon, Lord Belmorris proposed,—after they had ridden on for about another mile, that they should retrace their steps. By cantering across a large ploughed field which lay to their right, they could get by a shorter cut into the main road.

They turned in at the gate, therefore, and made for an opening at the further end of the field. ‘Mustard,’ finding,—perhaps,—that he was being urged in a homeward direction, soon broke from a canter into a gallop,—a much faster and more determined gallop than Lucy had ever experienced before.

‘Don’t give him his head too much !’ shouted Lord Belmorris, who was now some way behind.

‘Sit tight !’ she heard him call out by and by,—but his voice sounded, now, quite a long way off.

Lucy now realised that ‘Mustard’ was run-

ning away. At first, it was anything but an unpleasant sensation. Half the ploughed field was before her;—in so much open space it did not seem as if they could come to any real harm. The wind whistled in her ears, and large clods of earth were scattered to the right and left. Her hat was soon blown off, and her hair, which she fancied she had secured so firmly, became unfastened, and floated behind her like a banner.

At first she felt a good deal more astonished than frightened. At the extreme end of the field there was a gap in the stone wall, through which Lucy and her host had intended passing, but she soon perceived that ‘Mustard,’—instead of making for this gap,—was urging his mad career towards the stone wall itself,—beyond which there was, evidently, a considerable drop, for she could only discern the tops of the shrubs which grew upon the other side.

At the idea of this terrific jump, Lucy’s heart failed her, and inspired by fear, she did what was, perhaps, the only thing to be done. Leaning back, she brought her whole strength to bear upon the reins, and succeeded in turning ‘Mustard’s’ head to the right just as he came

up to the wall. He plunged and struggled for a while,—as though bent upon carrying out his original intention, and Lucy, who was, by this time, pale with terror, ran great danger of being thrown. But, just as she was giving herself up for lost, Lord Belmorris came up with her, and seized the reins. *He*, too, had been seriously alarmed, and had felt powerless to render her any assistance, being afraid that if he pursued her too closely, the sound of hoofs would only have urged on her impetuous steed. He bestowed great praise upon her for the adroit manner in which she had contrived to avert a catastrophe, and,—with some difficulty,—seeing that ‘Mustard’ still displayed signs of insubordination,—assisted her to dismount.

Standing, ‘pale as her sark’ with dishevelled tresses, in the middle of a ploughed field,—the grey clouds drifting over her uncovered head, Lucy presented an interesting but disconsolate picture. Seeing that all danger was over, however, she soon regained her presence of mind.

Lord Belmorris was jerking at ‘Mustard’s’ head with some show of irritation.

‘Oh, don’t hurt it, poor thing!’ Lucy called out; ‘perhaps it didn’t really mean any harm!’

Notwithstanding that she had now fairly recovered her courage, and that 'Mustard,' too, seemed somewhat quieted, Lord Belmorris refused to allow her to remount. But, as they were at least ten miles from home, and there did not appear to be any human habitation within sight, it was not easy, at once, to settle upon a plan of action. Pending a decision, Lucy went off in search of her hat. When she had recovered it, she saw that Lord Belmorris was riding off towards a distant corner of the field, and beckoning to her to follow. He was making for a small shed, in which, no doubt, he thought of securing the horses, and where she would be able to rearrange her disordered attire.

She laboured along as she best could. Some way from the shed Lord Belmorris met her, on foot, and assisted her towards it with his arm.

Upon entering the shed or 'bothie,' she saw that it was much larger than it had appeared from a distance. It had evidently been erected as a shelter for cattle, or as a feeding-place for man and beast during the intervals of ploughing. It was thatched neatly with dry heather, and was provided, inside, with a rough manger and plenty of clean straw.

'What a nice cosy little place!' cried Lucy, looking round with satisfaction.

It did, indeed, feel delightfully warm and comfortable, and, after plodding along in the teeth of the wind, seemed quite like a haven of rest.

'You must sit down here and keep quiet for a bit,' said Lord Belmorris, proceeding to build up a convenient resting-place with heather and straw; 'and we'll settle up the hair, and won't hurry ourselves the least bit in the world. We shall get back all right, I hope, for I've made up my mind what to do.'

He had fastened the horses to the manger with a couple of halters which he had fortunately discovered, and he now seated himself by Lucy's side upon his improvised divan, at a safe distance from their heels.

'I shall change the saddles,' he explained, 'as soon as I've set you to rights a little, and you shall go home upon "Merlin," who's just as quiet as an old pig.'

'Merlin' was the horse he had been riding himself, accounted even more lamb-like than 'Mustard;' but somewhat rougher in his paces, and, consequently, not so suitable for a lady.

This was why Lucy had not been mounted upon him in the first instance.

Two hair-pins were luckily discovered in Lucy's veil, for all the others had been hopelessly dispersed, and with the help of these, and of Lord Belmorris, she commenced re-arranging her dishevelled locks.

'I'm not half such a "duffer" as I was,' he said, with some pride.

He was alluding, no doubt, to the evening at Hampton Court when he had pinned his 'button-hole' on to her dress, and thinking that this was not the first occasion upon which he had performed for her the duties of a lady's-maid.

'What hair it is!' he added admiringly, as he stuck in the last of the two pins.

In this out-of-the-way shelter, Lucy and her companion seemed to be as far removed from all external influence and interruption, as Crusoe and his man Friday upon their desert isle. Through the opening that served for a door, they could see nothing but a desolate expanse of brown plough-land, dotted over with white-breasted plovers, that, unsuspecting of their near vicinity, had alighted close by in considerable numbers. Over-head, the grey wintry clouds went drifting past,

revealing, as they were rent asunder in their hurry, a glimpse of pale primrose towards the western horizon.

What a grateful sense of withdrawal from the striving world,—of privacy,—of remoteness,—of blessed and uninterrupted communion,—might she not have experienced upon this very same November afternoon, if only Lord Belmorris could have been suddenly transformed into *somebody else!* For, kind as he was, he did not seem to her to be *quite* the right person for the situation.

Had Lucy possessed any experience of life, she might, perhaps, have reflected that the remaining for an hour or more,—even with the ‘right person,’ in a desolate cow-shed,—is not always productive of results calculated to render smoother one’s after-journey, and she might have felt some sort of secret thankfulness for the security of her actual position.

She knew nothing, however, of such matters; and so was conscious only of a hungry yearning at her heart which she could in nowise have translated into words.

By-and-by, Lord Belmorris got up, and consulted his watch.

'We must be jogging on again,' he said sighing, as he helped her to rise. 'It's turned four o'clock, and we shan't be back till long after dark. I shall think of to-day,' he added, looking her full in the face; 'whenever I come upon this cow-shed, all the days of my life!'

'I shall often think of to-day, too,' returned Lucy simply; 'though I don't suppose I shall ever see this shed again.'

## CHAPTER XXII.

THERE are, no doubt, days upon which horses, like human beings, seem, as it were, to be possessed of the devil.

Lord Belmorris had taken the man's saddle from his own horse, and placed it upon 'Mustard,' and he then set to work to arrange the side-saddle upon the back of 'Merlin.' He had just succeeded, after some effort, in girthing it on securely,—when 'Merlin,'—of all horses in the world,—'Merlin,'—accounted almost too quiet and sluggish for convenience,—scared, possibly by something altogether novel in the situation, broke away suddenly from the manger, and with a frightened, swerving movement, dashed past Lucy, out of the door of the 'bothie,' and was very soon lost to view. Anything less like the behaviour of 'an old pig' could scarcely have been imagined.

'We're done!' exclaimed Lord Belmorris, with a low whistle; 'we'd better set about making ourselves comfortable for the night.'

Lucy looked at him inquiringly. Was he really in earnest, or only giving her a specimen of his 'dry wit?'

'Shall we really have to stay here all night?' she asked with concern.

'Unless you feel up to walking ten miles, I don't see what else we can do; for I'm not going to put you on that nasty brute again,—besides which, we've only the man's saddle.'

How were they possibly to get home?

The problem would have been much less difficult to solve if 'Mustard' had been the lamb-like creature he had been represented as being. Lord Belmorris might then, perhaps, have rigged up some sort of side-saddle, well versed as he was in all kinds of stable-work, and with the help of his own coat, and one of the old halters, arranged that Lucy should have been securely mounted, whilst he walked by her side, like a page of the olden-time, leading her bridle-rein. He might even have invented some kind of pillion, upon which she could have ridden behind him, and which would have been almost as plea-

sant and sociable a method of locomotion as the double-tricycle alluded to by Algernon Binks. But 'Mustard,' in his present uncertain mood, would not have been likely to brook any departure from the beaten track, and it might be rash, therefore, to subject him to experiments.

'I've been lodged for the night in many a worse crib than this,' remarked Lord Belmorris, as he leant against the entrance of the shed and flicked at the posts with his whip.

Lucy, too, was leaning against the doorway and looking out at the desolate landscape.

Twilight was fast gathering around them, and great violet clouds were floating across the pale lemon of the distant sky. The line of park-woods which they had passed on their way, looked like a mass of shadowy vapour collected to the extreme right. The white-breasted plovers had all of them disappeared, and a bat had commenced its monotonous flitting to and fro, so near to them that they could feel the air stirred by its wings upon their cheeks.

'It'll be dark in half-an-hour,' said Lord Belmorris, after he had again consulted his watch. Dazzled by the reflection from the evening sky, he had some difficulty in discerning the time.

By-and-by, he went back into the bothie and began unfastening 'Mustard's' halter.

'I think there's a way of getting home, after all,' he said; 'I'd quite forgotten the coal-pit.'

He had perceived the shaft in the distance, and it occurred to him that, perhaps, the colliers might be able to furnish them with some rough kind of conveyance.

'And, I daresay, you won't mind if it's only a wheelbarrow,' he said; 'so long as you're able to get home? For my own part, I'd rather have remained on here!'

He led 'Mustard' out of the shed as he was speaking.

'You'll have to stay here all by yourself, I'm afraid,' he said, as he mounted his horse. 'Don't get into any mischief; you may be sure that I'll be back as soon as I can.'

He put spurs to his horse, and set off across the brown ploughed field in the direction of the coal-pit.

As it happened, Lucy was not sorry to have a short time to herself. The last three weeks had seemed to her like a dream, and she had seldom found herself alone at moments when she felt capable of reflection or self-examination.

During the five months which had intervened between her visit to Hampton Court Palace and this darkening November afternoon, she had neither seen nor heard anything of Colonel Hepburn. He had avoided, as it seemed to her now, making any inquiries as to her mode of life, or place of residence, in order that he might be secured against any future entanglement. By the light of a daily-increasing experience, his behaviour seemed to admit of only one interpretation ; he had met her by a mere accident,—he had liked her just sufficiently well to prevent him from wishing her ‘at the bottom of the Red Sea ;’—being *a man*,—and prone, therefore, to yield to the temptation of the moment, he had permitted her to perceive this languid liking in order that she might minister to his vanity, and help him to play at sentiment when he had had nothing pleasanter to do ! He had kissed her, it is true, and his kisses were as the kisses of no other man could ever be,—they had seemed to her even as a sacrament,—sealing her for ever as his own ; but, no doubt—(as men were so different from women)—he had been merely obeying the impulse of the moment ; and, now, she was either utterly and entirely forgotten, or hope-

lessly confused, in his mind, with the heroines of many another moonlight flirtation! Those sacred moments, which must linger in her memory for ever, which had changed, as it were, the whole colour and current of her existence, had merely provided him with an amusing episode between a valse and a quadrille! They had met, and now they had parted; and he had no desire either to see her, or to hear of her again, or to renew any of his fleeting impressions, because he was '*not a marrying man!*' She had helped him to pass what might have been otherwise but a wearisome evening, and now she had served her turn and was done with! This was all. Perhaps, in time, and with the help of the bitterness that such musings brought with them, *she*, too, might have strength given her to forget, but this time had not come quite yet.

Alas! had Lucy only known that, at this very moment,—when the object of her thoughts was,—for aught she suspected to the contrary,—separated from her in body, spirit, and association,—her feet were actually set upon his inheritance; if she had guessed that this brown, ploughed field,—with the horses that had laboured in it,—were, alike, his property, and that the long line

of shadowy woodland, hard by, was the boundary-line of his home ;—she might, indeed, have marvelled,—as she had marvelled once before,—at the strange and unexpected workings of destiny !

When Lord Belmorris returned, it was very nearly dark. Lucy was so absorbed in her reverie, that she did not hear his horse's tread upon the soft ground until he was quite close at hand.

'It's all right,' he said, cheerfully ; 'if you can manage to walk as far as the "coal-hole." I shall leave "Mustard" here,—where an intelligent youth will see to his requirements till I can send over for him, and I've sent out scouts to bring back "Merlin." We shall have a rough kind of carriage for the first part of the way, for I've settled that we're to be run down in a truck with the coals ; but I've a friend who lives a little further on, and if we're set down near his place, I daresay I can borrow a "shay" to drive you home in. Sorry to say it looks a good deal like rain.'

They quitted their Crusoe-hut, and skirted the ploughed field, along a narrow footway bounded by a low stone wall. It was so dark now, that Lucy could scarcely see her way, and could only blindly follow Lord Belmorris's lead.

By the time they reached what he had designated the 'coal-hole,' it was raining steadily, and Lucy, in her clinging riding-habit, would have stumbled over the rough ground but for her companion's arm.

A group of colliers were awaiting their arrival, having come to an end of their day's labour. They were sullenly smoking their pipes in the rain,—wearing empty coal-sacks across their shoulders like shawls. Two of them carried lanterns, with which they lighted Lucy and Lord Belmorris to the trucks.

This single line of rough railway, ran from the mouth of the pit to a village some few miles distant, whence the coal was conveyed by regular trains to the nearest manufacturing town. The engine went only at a foot's pace, and it was to be stopped at a spot which Lord Belmorris had indicated to the driver.

Notwithstanding the sacking which the colliers had spread at the bottom of the open truck, Lucy soon felt that she was becoming as black as a chimney-sweep. Everything she touched was black, wet, and chilling. The rain was still falling, and knowing nothing of the locality, it seemed to her as if they were making their way

through a realm of impenetrable darkness. Lord Belmorris sat close by, at her side. He had pulled up the collars of his coat, and was softly humming to himself,—with no particular attempt at tune. The time appeared to Lucy to go with extraordinary slowness. By-and-by, Lord Belmorris called out to the engine-driver, and with a good deal of scraping and grating, the coal-trucks came to a stand-still. Lucy was assisted to descend from her uncomfortable position, and, after crossing the railway in the direction of a paling which ran parallel with the line, they passed through a white gate and found themselves in front of a neat-looking lodge.

Lord Belmorris went to the door, and tapped at it with the handle of his whip. A tall man, looking like a game-keeper, appeared in answer to the summons.

He recognised Lord Belmorris at once, notwithstanding his drenched condition, and invited him respectfully to enter the cottage. Lucy followed :—she felt by this time, rather chilled and exhausted, and the sight of a cheerful fire was very pleasant. Lord Belmorris explained the situation, and asked the keeper if he could lend ‘the young lady’ a change of raiment whilst her

riding-habit was being dried. Perhaps his wife could find something which she could slip on to go home in? . . . .

Lucy was grateful to her kind host for his paternal solicitude, but it turned out that the keeper was a widower. He pointed to three small children engaged at the tea-table with their bread and butter :—

‘They’ve not got no mother, now,’ he remarked sadly.

Lord Belmorris was evidently vexed at having touched inadvertently upon so painful a subject.

‘We’ll walk on to the house, then,’ he said to Lucy. ‘It’s not far off,—and get hold of the old housekeeper, who is a friend of mine. Anybody at home?’ he inquired, turning to the keeper.

The man replied in the negative, and invited his unexpected visitors to partake of tea before they again set off to brave the elements.

Lucy would willingly have availed herself of this invitation, but Lord Belmorris, remarking that she would most certainly be laid up with an ague if she sat for a moment longer in her damp clothes, hurried her out of the cottage and into the night.

There was neither moon nor star to be seen ;

but it was not too dark for Lord Belmorris, who, apparently knew the way well,—to distinguish path from brushwood. Lucy clung to his arm in silence, as they threaded their way through what seemed to be a shrubbery of young spruces. The rain had now almost ceased, but the drip from the overhanging branches pattered down upon their heads at every step. By-and-by they passed through some sort of defining boundary, and the trees, so far as Lucy could perceive,—appeared to be of much larger dimensions. The pathway became smoother and better tended ; it was as though they had entered the pleasure-grounds belonging to an extensive park. Suddenly, they emerged from this ‘mystery of covered ways,’ and Lucy could dimly distinguish, before her, an open space, studded over with trees trimmed into a variety of fantastic shapes, beyond which there arose what looked like a vast and shadowy palace.

Here and there, upon the basement-floor, lights twinkled at some of the many windows. Lord Belmorris, with Lucy still clinging to his arm, made his way across the lawn, and up to the front-door, which was approached by a broad flight of marble steps.

He rang the bell, and as the sound of it re-echoed through the house, a deep-mouthinged watch-dog, in some distant courtyard, began to howl furiously.

'I wonder,' said Lord Belmorris, as they waited together upon the door-step, 'whether you remember a fellow you met last summer, at Hampton Court? . . . . Anthony Hepburn;—nice fellow,—good-looking,—well off,—lives down here in my part of the world? . . . . This is his place.'

'Angels and ministers of grace defend me!' thought poor Lucy,—although, possibly, not in these very identical words.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

COLONEL HEPBURN,—and for this Lord Belmorris had been prepared by the keeper,—was,—at the present moment,—absent from Falconborough Park. The housekeeper, however,—a kind, motherly dame,—who informed Lucy that she had been the Colonel's nurse,—having taken him, she explained, 'from the month';—said, however, that he was expected shortly,—for a few days' shooting. A friend,—an officer in his regiment,—a Captain Sparshott,—she believed,—was to accompany him, and there were, consequently, two bedrooms all ready aired and prepared, in which his lordship and the young lady could set themselves in order after their drenching. The worthy dame would search amongst the Colonel's effects,—she said,—for some sort of warm cloak or wrapper, which Lucy might don in place of her soaking riding-habit;—whilst the

butler went at once to the stables to order that the brougham [might be prepared to convey them back to Belmorris after they had partaken of tea.

Lord Belmorris seemed to be well known to the few servants remaining at Falconborough. He was popular with all classes, and they commenced vying with one another in their attentions to the wet and belated wanderers.

Looking upon life and its strange combinations, with the eye of an experienced philosopher whom nothing can shock, astonish, or disconcert;—knowing, too, the extravagant demands and requirements of ‘the voracious goddess of Romance,’—I feel that I need scarcely be at the pains of informing my readers into *which* of the two luxuriously furnished sleeping apartments Lucy found that she had been ushered.

The door was closed upon her, and she looked about her as one in a dream.

*His* room,—where every visible object, in its very minutest detail, breathed and whispered to her of him! . . . . These walls had enclosed him;—on these pictures his eyes had rested,—yonder mirror had reflected his beloved form,—this happy carpet had been pressed beneath his

feet,—upon that iron bedstead, in the corner, he had reposed when he was weary! . . . .

Oh, strange, portentous, and unexpected chance that had led her,—Lucy Barlow,—into this sacred, spirit-haunted chamber;—by tortuous and mysterious ways,—situated, as it was, in a county separated by very nearly the whole length and breadth of the map of England from Clapham Common! . . . .

The housekeeper knocked at the door before Lucy had recovered from her bewilderment. She brought with her a long, heavy garment, trimmed with Astrachan wool and lined with grey squirrel.

‘What the Colonel always speaks of as his “old campaigner,”’ she explained, as she gave it into Lucy’s hand.

This cloak,—likewise eloquent of its absent possessor,—seemed to Lucy like the last straw in a whole camel-load of coincidences.

‘What is the use of struggling any longer against one’s destiny?’ she thought, as she took it from the housekeeper’s hands.

As soon as she was again alone, she made an examination of the room and its contents,—scrutinising every object with intense and almost

painful interest. Two pictures,—hanging upon either side of the bed,—particularly arrested her attention, for in each of them, it seemed to her, that there was something of *him*.

One was the portrait,—in miniature,—of a very beautiful woman, dressed in the fashion of some five-and-twenty, or thirty, years ago. Evidently from the likeness to Colonel Hepburn, this portrait represented his mother, and Lucy found herself contemplating it with mingled feelings of tenderness and admiration.

The other was a miniature of quite a young child,—the date of which it was less easy to determine, seeing that only the head was represented, without dress or adornment, emerging,—like an angel's,—from the clouds. Probably, (Lucy thought,) this was the portrait of a sister of Colonel Hepburn's, who might have died young, for,—as in the case of the beautiful lady upon the other side,—the child possessed his eyes,—and indeed the whole face seemed to her to be familiar by reason of its resemblance to his.

Thinking that Lord Belmorris would be awaiting her by this time, she next commenced making her toilet,—during which she had the privilege of smoothing her dishevelled tresses with an ivory

hair-brush, upon the back of which, under the presentment of two heraldic creatures were the initials 'A. H.' disposed in monogram.

The using of this sacred hair-brush caused Lucy intense emotion,—but she was afraid to linger any longer,—and so, set about arraying herself in her novel costume.

She took up the 'old campaigner,' and examined it with attention. It was well-worn, (worn by *him!* . . .) and weather-beaten, and its name seemed highly appropriate. She examined the pockets,—the buttons,—the military 'frogs,' and then wrapped it round her as she stood before the looking-glass. The arms were, of course, very much too long, and the waist-band,—for there was one attached to it,—came a great deal too low down. Lucy turned up the cuffs to the proper height, and, drawing the band out of its slides, tied it round her waist in a bow. The effect was anything but unbecoming. It was astonishing how well it fitted her,—upon the whole,—and, as it reached down very nearly to her feet, it felt delightfully warm and comfortable. Then,—after several fond and foolish little fetishisms,—which for the honour and glory of my sex, I

should be loath to reveal,—she tore herself from the hallowed chamber and rejoined Lord Belmorris below stairs.

She found him established in the library. *He*, too, had made several changes in his costume. He was delighted with the appearance she presented arrayed in the ‘old campaigner,’ although he declared that she looked for all the world like ‘a most ferocious little Afghan;’ and as he had travelled about a good deal, he probably knew exactly what an Afghan was like.

Lucy wished that she could have been left to herself if only for a few moments. She longed to dwell and linger over every object in this library, as she had done in the room above. Being of spacious dimensions, it was but dimly lighted by the one pair of candles which the butler had set upon a table, and she would have liked to have penetrated into every nook and corner.

But Lord Belmorris’s presence rendered any private investigations impossible, and he was, besides, somewhat impatient to get home. Supposing,—as might well have happened,—that ‘Merlin,’ with his riderless saddle, had found his

way back to his own stable,—there was no telling what alarm his presence might not have created. As soon, therefore, as they had partaken of tea, Lord Belmorris proposed that they should set off, and Lucy passed out,—probably,—as she thought,—for all time,—of this house which was now Anthony Hepburn's home.

She could see but little of the ‘deer park,’ as they drove towards the lodge-gates,—on account of the darkness. How often *he* must have taken his way beneath these overhanging branches! (she was thinking). Where was he *now*,—upon this very evening? . . . Had he any sort of presentiment that some one,—altogether forgotten,—it might be,—some one about whom he had never, perhaps, thought seriously at all!—had crossed, thus accidentally, the threshold of his home, and was being driven through the darkness over the old familiar ground? . . .

Lucy felt very grateful to her companion for his silence, as it enabled her to dream on. Knowing as he did, however, the geography of the country, he became aware, after some time had elapsed, that they were approaching home. Then, and not till then, he seemed to awaken from what

was probably, also,—a reverie. He drew nearer to her, and took possession of her hand in its manly sleeve.

‘Tell me,—little woman,’ he said, ‘for you know that I’m your Father-Confessor, and you’re bound to tell me everything;—have you enjoyed yourself to-day;—have you had a good time,—has to-day been a happy day?’

He spoke very earnestly, and was no doubt *looking* at her earnestly as well,—if she could only have seen the expression of his face, and he had quite put aside, for the moment, the language of the stable-helper.

Lucy did not exactly know whether she was expected to have ‘enjoyed’ the running away of ‘Mustard,’—the time passed amongst the coals,—or their walks through plough and brushwood in the drenching rain. The last portion of the eventful day had been too much fraught with varied emotions to be altogether what might be termed ‘enjoyable,’ but of course Lord Belmorris could know nothing of this.

‘We seem to have gone through a great deal,’ she answered, ‘and to have had a great many unexpected adventures. It’s different from any

other day I have ever passed before, and this has made it seem a good deal longer.'

'It's different from any other day that *I* have ever passed either,' returned Lord Belmorris, earnestly. 'It's about the happiest day I ever passed in my life, and this has made it seem a good deal shorter!' and with this they drove up to the door of Belmorris Castle.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

BUT it is time that I should return to Barlow Lodge and its venerable inmate.

Miss Elizabeth Barlow's line of conduct had been greatly simplified by the fact that Mr. Podmore had remained at Liverpool much longer than he had originally intended. Upon his return,—soon after Lucy came home from Hampton Court, he had appeared to be entirely occupied with business,—and he had still further relieved Miss Elizabeth's mind by begging that, for the present, she would postpone making known his wishes with regard to her great-niece.

Monsieur de la Vieilleroche,—who in common with most Frenchmen, prided himself upon his powers of observation,—was ready, he declared, to wager a very considerable sum, that Mr. Podmore's affairs were going through some alarming and critical phase. Mr. Podmore himself accounted

for the extra attention which he had been obliged to devote to his business in a variety of different ways,—having to do, for the most part, with commercial fluctuations, which Miss Elizabeth,—who did not possess a very keen intelligence with regard to business matters,—was unable altogether to understand.

‘I have become convinced,’—he had remarked to her upon one occasion,—‘that industry, probity, and attention, are not, now, sufficient in a business upon so large a scale as that in which I have embarked. Other accessories are needed. My heads of departments are well chosen;—I have taken infinite trouble with respect to *essentials*,—but there is,—as it were,—a lighter and more attractive element required. Some young gentleman of fashion,—who could advance the interests of our house in West-end circles,—would be able to render me the most valuable assistance; and I think I may almost say, at the present moment, that I see my way to securing the services of some such an eligible person.’

Mr. Podmore had drawn himself up to his full height after this speech, and had patted his waist-coat as only a man who was solvent and prosperous would have had the heart to pat it,—so

Miss Elizabeth thought,—and, soon afterwards, he had again left home for the purpose,—as he stated,—of making arrangements for the engagement of a fashionable partner.

At about this time the ‘Infant’ who was the real possessor of ‘The Aspens’ had attained his majority, and decided upon disposing of the remainder of the lease. Mr. Podmore, as the reader may remember, had long coveted this property, and a report soon became current in the neighbourhood to the effect that he was making preparations for its purchase.

The old French Professor,—acting as Lucy’s friend,—and repudiating for this reason, any notions as to Mr. Podmore’s great wealth, was of opinion, he said, that this accession of territory could not be obtained in the present equivocal state of his affairs except by borrowing the necessary funds; and he was extremely sinister in his surmises as to the insecurity of Mr. Podmore’s financial position.

‘Indeed, my dear Marquis,’ Miss Elizabeth had replied to some of these unfavourable insinuations, ‘I feel certain that,—for a wonder,—you are entirely mistaken! Mr. Podmore upon obtaining possession of this property, has some

grand project for making it yield double and treble its present return. If he can only persuade the person now living at "The Aspens,"—the lady with whom you are acquainted,—to quit the place before the expiration of her lease,—he would begin at once to carry out his scheme. I hope this may be the means of restoring your confidence,—otherwise I should have kept the fact a profound secret!'

But for all this, ever since Lucy had been invited to stay at Belmorris Castle, her great-aunt had taken much less interest in the affairs of her consequential neighbour. I need not say what ambitious dreams were agitating her aged breast,—for the reader has been made aware of them already.

'Here is the key of the large tin box under my bed,' she had said to Sarah soon after she had been informed of the invitation: 'take it, my good girl, and get out,—with great care,—my set of ermine-trimmings which you will find, just inside, done up in blue paper. Shake them well, —each piece separately, and then hang them over the back of a chair near the open window in Miss Lucy's bedroom,—not in mine,—for with the wind in this quarter they will receive the blacks;

—and if you should come upon some large cigars which have been placed there to keep off the moth,—put two or three of them upon the mantelpiece in the dining-room,—for I should like to offer them to the Marquis, as he is a smoker,—when he pays us a visit this evening.'

In view of a most desirable union which did not seem, now, to be so utterly impossible,—might it not be expedient that the ermine-trimmings and the plum-coloured *moiré-antique* should likewise be joined together?

Lucy, however, seeing that Mr. Podmore was now so much from home, and knowing nothing further, as yet, of the proximity of Belmorris Castle to Falconborough Park,—than that both places were situated 'in the North;—had not displayed any particular anxiety to accept this second invitation, and had only done so, eventually, in obedience to her great-aunt's express desire. Her Hampton Court experiences had strangely troubled the placid waters of her existence. Like a ship which has been tossed and buffeted in mid-ocean, she had regained her quiet haven, and she had no wish,—just yet, to put out again to sea.

In mind,—in heart,—in appearance, even,—

she had been a good deal changed by this first voyage into the unknown. Miss Elizabeth Barlow was of opinion that she was greatly improved. She had acquired a certain amount of serviceable small-talk,—in which, previously to her departure,—she had been altogether deficient;—she bore herself with more dignity and assurance, and had discovered that speech is useful,—sometimes,—for the purpose of concealing thought. Adeliza Binks, too, had given her several valuable hints upon the subject of dress,—about which, however, she could not,—as yet, feel any very absorbing interest;—whilst the society of persons who, appeared to look upon life entirely in its lighter and more superficial aspect,—had left its trace upon her conversation and demeanour.

But Lucy Barlow had been created with one of those earnest and concentrated natures,—unfortunate, because existing, nearly always, in a minority, and oppressed, therefore, with a certain sense of isolation,—which, in the presence of trivialities, is cast down and disheartened. She had been intended to meet, and combat, the great emergencies of life,—and in the company of those whose aims were either petty or sordid, she felt constrained and uncomfortable.

As, however, she was endowed with youth, health, beauty, and,—more uncommon than either of these,—an admirable sense of humour,—there were moments when her friends might have credited her with high spirits, or, her foes with flippancy. But all such ebullitions were sadly transient,—mere temporary reactions after some more than usually pensive mood.

*Happiness*, rather than pleasure or amusement,—the happiness which is shared and ministered to by another,—seemed to her the chief aim and object of her earthly existence, and she realized now, that, unknown to herself, she had been longing for the coming of this other being even before she had arrived at woman's years.

Lucy's ideal had become,—as it were,—incarnate, in the person of a good-looking Colonel of Lancers; but apart from anything having to do with his outward appearance,—Anthony Hepburn was possessed of the voice and bearing of a hero of romance,—and there was something in the reserve of his ordinary manner, suggestive of the mystery and incomprehensibility in which an idol—if it is to remain an idol,—ought always to be shrouded.

No wonder, therefore, that Lucy Barlow had

returned from Hampton Court Palace a changed woman,—with a look of regretful tenderness in her brown eyes which Miss Elizabeth had never observed there before, and which she had not perceived for many many years past in her own. The woman who feels, upon entering life, that she is too feeble to stand alone, and who is yet capable of passionate and unquestioning devotion,—is sorely in need of a guide and comforter who can be always with her,—by sea as well as by land, by daylight as well as in the silent watches of the night;—who will neither go upon long journeys, nor be assailed by dangers like husband or lover,—whose strong arm shall be even as a shield and buckler, and upon whose bosom she can rest and be content. Herein,—and apart from all selfish strivings after the saving of one's own soul,—lies the real power and consolation of religion;—and such consolation is more particularly grateful to those women who have been taught by the indifference of man that they are unfitted for the tenderer, if less enduring, emotions:—

‘I was not good enough for man,  
And so am given to God,’

sighs Charles Kingsley's ‘Ugly Princess.’ But

the Lucy of my story was different. She was 'good enough for man,' in all conscience, notwithstanding that the force of her infatuation led her to humble herself in the presence of the man she loved. But she had often longed that God Himself could have seemed to be more near, although she felt that she could even have *prayed* better in the presence of the Beloved. The religion, however, to which she had hitherto conformed, had not, altogether, satisfied her aspirations, and the God that had been set up above her was too august and terrible to become her friend.

Miss Barlow the elder,—whilst upholding, in theory, many of the prejudices and austerities of the now obsolete Clapham Sect,—had seemingly draped her spiritual convictions in the garb of an adaptive conventionality, by which their original bent had become distorted and obscured;—and most of the other followers of the Suburban God had appeared to Lucy to conform to a creed which was vulgar, hypocritical, and un-Christianly intolerant. Then, suddenly,—in the path of this girl to whose ardent imagination had been revealed a God disfigured by many of the petty failings of a man,—there had arisen a man seeming to her to be endowed with the dignity

and nobility of a god, and she had fallen down, straightway,—and worshipped him.

It was shortly after Lucy's return home from Hampton Court, that Anthony Hepburn gradually came to be enshrined in her mind as an Ideal Being, and she could not prevent herself from keeping for ever on the alert for his second coming, —whilst feeling, at the same time, that such an event was in the highest degree improbable.

The stopping of a hansom cab within even twenty yards of Barlow Lodge, would set her heart beating with extraordinary rapidity,—whilst the sight of a tall man in a shooting-jacket caused her almost to faint with emotion. She could see Anthony Hepburn so plainly in her mind's eye, that she was always expecting the realisation of her fancy,—and could never, now, look out of the window, without a hope and a prayer in her heart.

One morning,—quite early,—about a month after her return from Hampton Court Palace,—(for this chapter,—it will be perceived,—is retrospective,)—so strongly was she possessed with this infatuation,—that she could almost have believed that her perpetual prayer had been heard. A male figure,—clothed as *he* might perfectly have been clothed,—and looking,—with its back

towards her,—at least,—just as *he* might have looked in a like position,—was seated upon a public bench a little to the right of the entrance to Barlow Lodge,—reading a newspaper, and smoking a cigarette. He was some way off, facing the Common, with the trunk of a lime-tree rising behind him, and partly concealing his form. As he was sitting down,—it was possible that,—when he stood up,—he might turn out to be quite a short man, although he did not look like one in his present position;—but he was leaning forward in an attitude which seemed to Lucy to be almost painfully familiar, and his left ear, and the half of the back of his head which was not concealed by the lime-tree, looked, oh, so fearfully and wonderfully like! . . . The real Anthony however, was so mixed up, and confused, in her imagination, with the Ideal Being, that she could not,—upon the spur of the moment, indulge in anything like certainty;—and why in the world,—seeing that he had taken no pains whatever to discover her whereabouts,—should he suddenly appear to her seated upon a public bench upon Clapham Common? . . .

Before she had had time to answer this question, the breakfast-bell had sounded, and

she hurried downstairs to make her great-aunt's tea, for Miss Elizabeth was the soul of punctuality.

When she had peeped out again,—after her breakfast, a very ordinary-looking person indeed,—bearing no sort of resemblance to either the real or the ideal Lancer,—was sitting, smoking, upon the public bench just over the road,—to the right. Could this be the same individual that she had observed little more than half-an-hour ago? . . . Probably,—for it was not the first time she had been thus deceived. Evidently, she was becoming possessed of but one idea! . . .

In this way, the uneventful days slipped by, until the lime-trees upon Clapham Common,—which assume an autumnal tint before real country trees,—began to grow sere and yellow. There was a fine show of pears hanging against the grey lichenized wall which separated Barlow Lodge from The Aspens;—the fruit upon the gnarled medlar-tree was getting brown and ready for picking, and the fallen leaves began rustling about all over Miss Elizabeth's trim little lawn, until the kitten became quite excited, and ran after them, thinking they were mice. London,—that lurking mystery,—which seemed every day to be creeping nearer and nearer,—was now

oftener than ever shrouded in brumous vapour;—the lamplighters went forth much earlier upon their rounds, for its many eyes began to twinkle soon after four o'clock, and little Miss Van Buren, next door,—whom Lucy had only caught sight of at a distance since her return home,—had exchanged her pretty summer frocks for a smart blue velvet pelisse trimmed with swan's down.

Everything, in fact, heralded but too plainly the approach of winter,—and ere long Lucy Barlow once more quitted her quiet suburban home, bound for Belmorris Castle.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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